

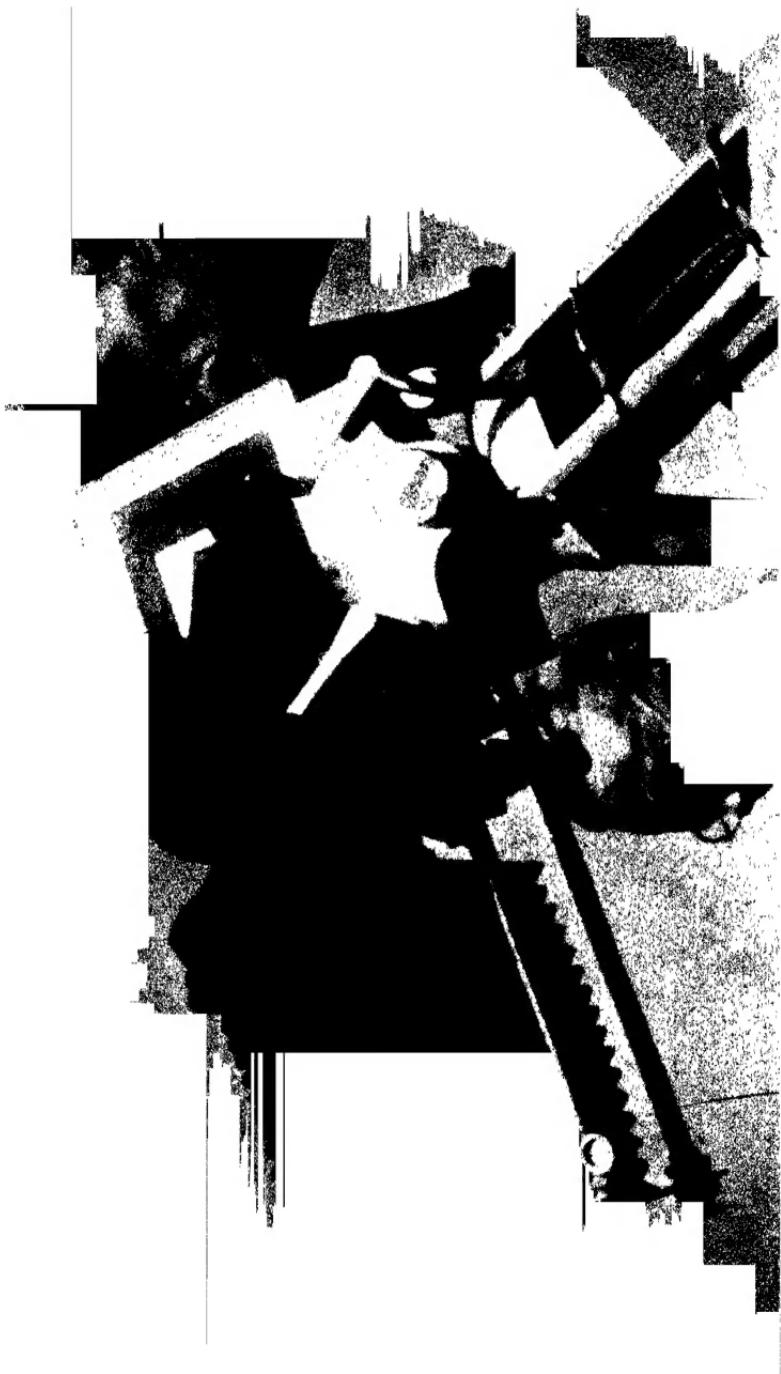
DOCUMENTARY FILM

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by the same author

THE FILM TILL NOW [1930]

CELLULOID: THE FILM TO-DAY [1931]



DOCUMENTARY FILM

PAUL ROTHA

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PREFACE BY JOHN GRIERSON

Documentary, as many complain, is a hard-sounding word, suggestive of pedagogics and even, in some sense, of medicine. Mr Korda, who recently came into the field with his *Conquest of the Air*, has cursed it for the money it must tend to drive from the box-office. Those of us who made a trade of documentary had every intention of being doctors in cinema. Here, in the reporting and interpretation of fact, was a new instrument of public influence, which might increase experience and bring the new world of our citizenship into the imagination. It promised us the power of making drama from our daily events and poetry from our problems. It offered a contact with the life of the community deeper and more intimate than anything journalism and the other arts were giving us. We quite naturally and quite deliberately seized on it. We did not mean, like Mr Korda, to flatter the box-office: we meant to force it. The commercial cinema in its service of the box-office did not appreciate those new possibilities nor welcome those of us who drew attention to them. Our stand had necessarily to be an independent and even blatant one, and the word 'documentary' with its sense of fact suited our mood. We have held to it and taken it into the theatres against every opposition that Wardour Street could invent; and I have no doubt Mr Korda will live to spread it across his own advertisements. For documentary has a public importance beyond itself.

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The need of the times, as the growth of the art of public relations may testify, was certainly with us. It called for the development of new instruments of public reporting. Here was one which, in comparison with platform speech and the descriptive word, had, in its method, all the advantage of physiology over anatomy. It dealt with the living fact, and with the increasing complexities of our society, theory and doctrine had become progressively isolated from the living fact. Cinema could be a bridge between; broadcasting and television could be others. Our documentary method was a first and ready step in bringing things alive, a new and deeply needed method of public reporting. If the Trade did not welcome us, there were others ready to do so.

Government Departments, industries, and social organisations were quick to appreciate the instrument we held out to them, and documentary has till now been bred in this public service. When Wardour Street refused to distribute our films, there were critics of good-will all over the country ready to force our introduction to the public; and in this, none has served us more vitally than the critics of the Trade papers. In the last resort, and an important point it is, there was a film audience of millions growing up outside the theatres, large enough and receptive enough to secure the existence of a more considered and public spirited use of cinema. Mr Rotha is right, therefore, when he associates the word 'propaganda' so persistently with the growth of documentary. The secret of its growth has certainly been in the public instruction

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it pretended. That stone which the Wardour Street builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner. It determined the subject-matter of documentary, created its technique, secured its honesty, and discovered its economy. The power of making things known that need to be known is the principal promise of documentary to-day; and if the growth of British documentary has been more consistent and more fruitful than others, it is because it has been true to this first purpose. In spite of criticism from the aesthetes and temptation from the commercials, it has avoided, on the whole, the sacrifice of fact to artiness and of good reporting to impressionism. It could have had a greater commercial success in a sentimental and popular journalism and might have followed Mr Flaherty into idyll and far horizons, but it has stood more or less plainly to its social intention.

Various changes, divisions and even separations have taken place in the practice of the art since it was first developed. If I remember rightly, documentary was first used to describe the art of Mr Flaherty's *Moana* in a hurried article for a New York paper, and Mr Flaherty's art it represented for many a day. It stood for those theories of 'action on the move', 'the spontaneous on the screen', 'the drama in the living fact', which he first initiated and in which some of us were first trained. If we did not then use the word 'realism', it was for the good reason that, whatever Mr Flaherty might be in idyll and romance, he was never, in the academic sense, a realist. The realism came later and particularly in England. There, documentary,

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discarding the far horizons of Flaherty, got down to themes and materials under its nose, with a clearer social theory than the French and the Germans and a closer observation of work and workers than the Russians. It may be because the English school has theorised more, written more and, as Mr Rotha points out, co-operated more: certainly it is for the English theories of contemporary report that documentary is known to-day. That emphasis is conveyed by Mr Rotha's book. It may appear a heavy emphasis for an outlook so new and still, as I believe, so immature in its finished work. But this may be said. Because of its surer social basis, the future is with it. It has the growing consideration of many young men of ability who have come in from poetry, painting, music, journalism and academics, to serve it. It has an economic basis secure from the commercial anarchy of the cinema Trade. And an even wider field stands open to the documentary method, first in the sound of the B.B.C. and later, when television comes, in the film sequences which must in large part supplant the present reproductive work of the microphone.

The B.B.C. has been conservative till now in the use of its instruments. Its producers have used the microphone very much as the early film makers used their camera. They have accepted it as an essentially immovable object to which all action or comment must be brought; as a reproductive instrument capable of repeating speeches, talks, music, fairy stories, readings of poetry and the like, but without creative power of its own. A few simple deviations there have been in the

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so-called 'actuality' programmes (in this borrowing from our documentary example), but they have been so tentative and ill-equipped, that for all its years of work and national fields of opportunity the B.B.C. has created no art of microphonic sound and, in its own technique, not a single artist. The best that can be said about our microphone producers is that some of them are also writers. It would be foolish, of course, to expect the B.B.C. to be creative in all its branches of activity, or belabour the public ear at every turn with experiment. It does a great work in reproducing the best of music and the best of public thinking. But, in the proportion of, say, a fifth of its energy, other more vivid and, in technique, more modern methods of address are open to it. Neither talk nor description has seized the opportunity which the microphone gives for variety of observation. Presently, I expect, the documentary method will teach it how to take its microphone afield and improve the character and inspiration of its announcements. Cabined and confined they are, not only in their technique but in their reference, and this is a serious matter if the public imagination is to be developed and fired. The lecture method, now so generally adopted, is a Victorian conception unworthy of our modern instruments and impotent in the face of modern problems. We cannot lecture into life a society so complex, though the B.B.C. is bravely trying to do so. We cannot even lecture it into life by adding, like the B.B.C., viewpoints of men in the street written by men who are not in the street. The reporting of public affairs must go deeper than viewpoints alto-

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gether. It must go to the quick of actual experience. We have, by the documentary method, the means to do this, for the orchestral possibilities of the sound band are many. Description and commentary, interview and vernacular, natural sound and created chorus offer in combined orchestration a quality of reporting which must widen experience and increase insight as no previous method can hope to do. If this possibility is realised, at good last we may hear not only the voice of the pundit, but the voice of the people.

I have no doubt that the B.B.C. must follow this line of development both now and, more largely, when television comes. Confining itself to reproduction, it has raised a body of criticism both inside and outside Broadcasting House. It is, on all hands, held to be out of touch with reality. It is felt to be too genteel or too priggish, or both. Yet this is, in essence, only the reflection of a false method which even its good national intention has failed to vitalise. The council table, however representative it may be, is not the most real reflection of public life, nor the most inspiring reflection of the public imagination. Its analysis in a complex time like ours must still fall short of the living fact. It is as a council table that the B.B.C. has conceived itself. Yet this consideration might guide it. In broadcasting we address an audience of millions. It may ask for rational guidance on this problem or that but, in the last instance, it is, in its be-millioned head, the nation asking for experience: asking to be brought alive to itself that it may feel its destiny and will its life. And this, the expert, by the very specialisation which

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modern conditions have forced on him, is too detached to give. The artist might, and the prophet might, but they are too limited by the incapacity of their media, and have lost touch. Their poems and their prophecies and their high words of wisdom fly like Leonardo's cameleone through an air so rarified that no man at heart can follow them. As I see it, the first requirement of the public imagination to-day is something quite simple. It is a new system of reporting and a new school of reporters: working not as now in print, but in sound and in sound film: operating not as now in slick and passing and all too occasional visits to the industries and the communities, but living in them and building out of them as we have laid down in our documentary method. That is the lesson documentary has to teach. Let the facts be given and the implications laid; let the platform solutions and the considerations of the council chamber follow the *sharing of experience*.

Considering the documentary method in this way, the conception of documentary as propaganda tends to become confusing. Mr Rötha has, very rightly, analysed the relation of documentary to propaganda, but it is a limiting conception for a method which must inspire art and education alike. A distinction is necessary and Mr Rötha has asked me to make it. Our own relation to propaganda has been simple enough. We have found our finances in the propaganda service of Government Department and national organisation. The desire to make known and widely known the public services and social references they represented was, in every sense, the opportunity for our documen-

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tary art. Propaganda and art were at one in both material and policy. Documentary gave to propaganda an instrument it needed and propaganda gave to documentary a perspective it needed. There was therefore virtue in the word 'propaganda', and even pride; and so it would continue for just as long as the service is really public and the reference really social. If, however, propaganda takes on its other more political meaning, the sooner documentary is done with it the better.

Art is wider than political doctrine and platform solution, for the plain good reason that art must more deeply and more lastingly maintain life. It may, like politics, realise the social ills, but it must also sympathise more widely. It is not for the controversialist to see both sides of the question, for the other side he rightly leaves to his opponent. The artist must say a word even for the Devil. The controversialist's call is to action and to immediate action. The artist's call is to consideration. He is the taproot of experience itself; describing it, discussing it, dramatising it and, in good and evil, organisation and chaos, birth and death, making it live. So formulating experience, so maintaining the will to order and create which is the will to live, his function is done. If, in propaganda, he shrinks to the writing of revolutionary war songs and the composition of political manifestos it is not that art and politics have been joined. All that has happened is that the artist has become a politician. 'It is the artist in whose hands the truth becomes a living principle of action.' So far one may wisely go with Mill but, for

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guidance on this action or that, the word passes to another level of interpretation and to other leaders. It may be difficult for artists in these times to keep their heads out of politics. They may, however, console themselves with the thought that first implications are not always the most important. The great revolutionaries of our time in art were not Barbusse and Mayakowsky but Cézanne and Joyce.

Readers of Mr Rotha's book must tease out this distinction for themselves. It is an important one and no fashionable (and, I believe, politically slipshod) affection for the radical in art should muddle their judgment. As the distinction affects this book it affects the forms of documentary very seriously. Calls to action will suggest *Turksib* forms, or, as Mr Wells would say, epileptic forms. With a wider consideration of the function of our art and a full appreciation of what the sharing of experience means to our time the range of forms must inevitably be wider. I, for my part, cannot suggest how wide. All I know is that the problems and protagonists of this modern life of ours cannot be fitted into the old myths. The new material will determine its own forms according as we understand it. And we are a long way yet from understanding.

It is Mr Rotha's case, however, and not mine with which this book is concerned; and we agree on most things. I am glad that the documentary method has been promoted to the fuller consideration of a book. In its potential it brings a new light to public education and a new outlook to art; and as a social power it is a first concrete reply to the unnecessary pessimisms

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of democratic theory. I am particularly glad that the book has been done by Mr Rötha. Mr Rötha is one of the most important makers of documentary films and that fact he has, with a historian's diffidence, too much concealed. But it gives an authority to his record which no outsider's word could possibly have. Our films have been short for the most part and their output trifling in comparison with the main body of studio production, but whoever reads this book must realise the deep considerations which have gone to the creation of this documentary method.

CONTACT (Rotha)

AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

I have written this book to replace the theoretical discussions in *The Film Till Now*. Revision of the catalogue part of that survey of cinema must wait until further time and opportunity arise.

This new book is not in whole addressed to the practitioners of cinema, nor is it intended for the person who sees the film simply as an art. Its aim is to convey something of the social and economic basis upon which a certain method of film-making—that which we have called 'documentary'—is now being built to fulfil certain purposes at this moment of political apprehension and social disintegration.

Briefly, I look upon cinema as a powerful, if not the most powerful, instrument for social influence to-day; and I regard the documentary method as the first real attempt to use cinema for purposes more important than entertainment. If the reader associates with cinema only a repetition of senseless stories revolving round, for the most part, second- or third-rate actors, then he will completely fail to comprehend the significance of the documentary movement. If he has permitted the story-film, in its function as a provider of universal entertainment, to blind him to cinema's other and wider uses, then the discovery of the existence of documentary as something more influential will probably surprise him.

It is not my aim, as some will undoubtedly be quick to assume, to decry or limit the functions of the cinema

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as entertainment. I derive too much pleasure from some fiction films to make such a dogmatic plea. But I do ask recognition of the fact that the story-film, with its artificial background of studio and stars, with its subjects dictated by profit-making and personal ambition, is only *one* kind of film; that the technical and cultural achievements of the cinema of the future are more likely to come from the field of documentary and journalistic film than from the studios of entertainment.

Unfortunately, the commercial success of cinema has led many of us to believe that the value of a film lies in its power to create immediate sensation. That belief has done incalculable harm to cinema and transitory good only to its exploiters. It represents an attitude which must, under present economic conditions, be closely associated with the film made for amusement. Documentary, on the other hand, must meet the acid criticism of time. Its aim is no Saturday night hit or miss. Its message is for a community. Its purpose is not only to persuade and interest imaginations to-day but several years hence. For this reason, and for the many others dealt with later, I suggest that documentary demands greater production cares, more skilful craftsmanship and a more profound reasoning behind its choice of theme and its approach to material facts than does the story-film. If its aim were simply to describe for historical value, accuracy would be its main endeavour. But it asks creation in dramatic form to bring alive the modern world. It asks understanding of human values and knowledge of the issues

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governing our society to-day as well as in the past. It asks for the mind of the trained sociologist as well as the abilities of the professional film technician. Thus, in criticism, the functions and development of the documentary film should be kept distinct from those of the amusement cinema. To draw these distinctions, together with an investigation into the documentary method itself, is my present intention.

Our very familiarity with everyday surroundings prohibits us from forming a true estimate of them. That is why the documentary film has an important purpose to fulfil in bringing to life familiar things and people, so that their place in the scheme of things which we call society may be honestly assessed. The world of documentary is a world of commerce and industry and agriculture, of public services and communications, of hygiene and housing. It is a world of men and women, at work and leisure; of their responsibilities and commitments to the society in which they live. But really impartial discussion of the economic, political and social systems which control our citizenship immediately assumes the air of heresy. Hence documentary and its exponents are always open to suspicion. Criticism of accepted ideas is usually considered offensive. Anyone who throws doubt on accepted beliefs is subject to attack. Your documentalist is, in this respect, continually in a pillory. He must be prepared to respect that position.

In the original plan for this book, I had intended dealing with the importance of the cinema as a factor in modern education. But, as the book progressed, it

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became clear that the educational film should be considered separately from the documentary movement. Without embarking on a discussion of the whole problem of education, it can be easily seen that the cinema is a most fitting instrument for bringing about enlightenment in the child mind. That is why I, personally, place a higher value on the so-called general illustration film than on the direct teaching, or instructional, film. If it is not to surplant the teacher, which is not desirable, the latter type of film at its best can be but an animated pictorial lecture to supplement the blackboard and the magic-lantern. The general knowledge film, on the other hand, is wholly suitable to present in illustrative terms the whole world of work (or perhaps lack of it), administration and leisure which will confront the child in those awakening years preceding puberty; making it possible for a child's horizon to be occupied with something other than sport and sex-curiosity, so that it may grow up into a thinking, reasoning and questioning member of the community. The advent of a classless educational system reaching to a proper age is naturally desirable for this, because I believe that the child's mind between the ages of thirteen and sixteen is the most susceptible to the influence of the film. The instructional film fulfils a wholly different purpose. Its aim is, presumably, to teach direct facts and, in doing this, it has little connection with the imaginative background film. Here and there the two overlap. In some cases the material of 'impressionist' documentary is that of the instructional film. But fundamentally the two

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kinds of film must be considered apart. Hence I decided that in this present survey it would be wiser to deal only with the aims of the documentary film as a propagandist, social and illuminatory instrument, leaving to others the task of making a proper and full enquiry into the instructional field. Of the various books recently published, I give preference to W. H. George's *The Cinema in the School* because, despite its unrepresentative estimate of what is being accomplished in the educational film, it is the most sensible in outlook and is based on practical experience.

There is, however, one point which I feel should be made here. That is the significant fact that it is primarily the industrialist and the Government official and *not* the educationalist who are to-day making possible the development of the cultural film by providing the all-important means of production. Ostensibly serving the needs of propaganda or, if you prefer it, furthering the aim of public relations, documentary is at the same time fulfilling a definite instructional purpose. It is being enabled to do so by the financial resources of industry and commerce, an aspect of education and propaganda that is worth considerable contemplation.

One further side of documentary demands attention, a side relating to the distribution and exhibition of such films, to which I attach the greatest importance. If it is agreed that documentary films represent in their sphere a cultural development of the cinema, then the Cinematograph Films Act of 1927 is seriously hindering the cinema in this development.

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It is well known that under the ruling of the Act exhibitors and renters of this country must include certain percentages of registered quota films in their programmes and schedules. In general, however, documentary does not comply with the stipulations laid down by the Act (which was framed before documentary became manifest), because films 'depicting wholly or mainly news and current events' and 'natural scenery' cannot be registered as quota. On the other hand, should a film contain 'views of buildings' it may apparently rank as quota, since buildings are not, it would seem, scenery. Actually, the situation would be farcical if it were not so serious. Whereas such a film as *For All Eternity* or *B.B.C.: The Voice of Britain* secures quota, *The Voice of the World* or *The Key to Scotland* does not, unless 'evidence can be produced that the film possesses special exhibition value'. Why, if the *Secrets of Nature* films are given quota, should it be denied to all forms of cultural cinema? Not only is this refusal to grant quota to many documentaries hindering valuable experiment in training directors, but the Board of Trade is actually responsible for hampering the use of the cinema as a cultural medium.

As I write, news comes to hand that British documentary has carried off the highest awards in its class at the Brussels International Film Festival. Here, yet again, is evidence of the spread of the documentary method and, in particular, it is especially gratifying that Britain appears to be leading the world in this type of film. Three out of the four documentaries

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gaining awards owe their production to John Grierson. Coming at this moment, it is a fitting tribute to the immense amount of work and guidance that he has contributed to the building up of documentary in this country. I take this opportunity of thanking him for writing a Preface to this book.

In conclusion, certain acknowledgments must be made. For loan of photographs to: Alberto Cavalcanti, Charles Livesay, Marjorie Lockett, Marie Seton, Paul Strand and to *Cinema Quarterly* and The International Cinema Bureau, Moscow. For permission to reproduce to: G.P.O. Film Unit, Messrs G. B. Instructional, Strand Films, Fox Film Corporation, Paramount, Radio Pictures, Wardour Films and others. My thanks are especially due to my wife for her work in collecting data and indexing.

P. R.

October, 1935

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"Art cannot be non-political."

MAYERHOLD

"I look upon cinema as a pulpit, and use it as a propagandist; and this I put unashamedly because, in the still unshaven philosophies of cinema, broad distinctions are necessary."

JOHN GRIERSON

One

INTRODUCTION TO CINEMA

One

INTRODUCTION TO CINEMA

(i) SOCIAL ASPECTS

On frequent occasions we have heard it alleged that the enemy of social consciousness among the people is amusement. But it would surely be more accurate to say that it is rather the shape and style which, for various reasons, manufacturers give to amusement that is one of the real hindrances to the general ripening of social and civic responsibility.

The reason may even lie deeper. Drab conditions of daily occupations, lack of opportunity for individual obligation and collective enthusiasm, both apparently an inevitable part of modern life in a Western existence, are certain obstacles to the growth of social realisation and combine to make it easier for worthless entertainment to be passed off on the people in their search for relaxation. The barrier to improvement of entertainment seems to be not only the limits defined by the economic forces underlying production, but also the present state of society which makes possible the acceptance by the public of the existing type of amusement.

Fortunately, however, indications that present methods of ordering society are in some cases proving inadequate, together with the breakdown of so many

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long-cherished beliefs, are doing much to stimulate public apprehension. Whether we want it or not, our era is proving such that influences over which we personally have no control are compelling us to take an active interest in the shaping of our future lives, unless we are unintelligent enough to allow others to dictate our fate.

Three main aspects of change confront us, says Mr Wells, 'the problem of arresting the onset and development of war destruction, the problem of socialisation and the reorganisation of distribution because of the change-over from scarcity to plenty, and the problem of monetary catastrophe due to the entire inadequacy of our financial organisation in the face of witless, smartness and contemporary needs'.¹

Maybe it is true that most of us dislike facing strange and new changes. Maybe many of us do permit our personal wishes and private lives to obscure the great issues that confront civilisation. Maybe we do, in our desperate effort to exist at all, feel satisfaction in the winning of our own small struggles. But conditions and events are such that we cannot continue in this way of thinking and living for long.

With the constant repetition of strikes, assassinations, disasters, pogroms and every form of economic and political crisis that have crowded the social horizon of recent years, it is true to say that the individual is beginning to take a greater interest generally in public affairs and to enquire more into his

¹ *The New America: The New World* (Cresset Press), 1935.

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relations with society than he has done previously in this so-called age of democracy. Faced with the unsettled state of social conditions that exists to-day, the ordinary man is demanding to know more of his position in international affairs, more of how things have been permitted to arrive at this apparently deplorable state and precisely what steps are being taken to meet the situation and by whom. Every day I come across persons who manifest increasing anxiety not only at the growing complexity of political and social problems but at the patent inability of those in power to find adequate solutions. That there exists, indeed, a lively demand for illumination into such matters the publishing profession and the controllers of radio discussions have been quick to realise.

Politics, for example, are daily becoming of increasing interest to millions of people who only a few years ago regarded their discussion as abhorrent. Not politics in the old meaning of the word, perhaps, but politics embracing economics, sociology, culture and, in many cases, religion. The almost terrifying political storms which have taken place during the last fifteen years and which are taking place to-day, together with the inevitable disturbances of the immediate future, are rapidly becoming the concern of the ordinary person no matter how secure he or she may at present like to feel. Civilisation to-day, in fact, presents a complexity of political and social problems which have to be faced by every thinking person.

As soon as politics concern the shape and plan of our civic system, as soon as they concern our very homes

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and means of livelihood, it rests with the ordinary person to act not merely as a passive voter but as an active member of the State. His practical cooperation, criticism and even active opposition is demanded and he must be intelligently equipped to meet that demand.

The amount of interest, however, displayed by the ordinary public in the management of a country and its problems of government is obviously conditioned by the social system of that country. Where the functions of government are restricted, as under a parliamentary form, and the economic system is permitted full sway, comparatively small interest is forthcoming from the individual whose hands are full holding down his job (if he has one) or living at other people's expense. But as soon as the State exercises influence over factors contributory to society, such functions quickly become matters of public interest and provoke public attention.

In this country, for instance, immediately the State assumes control of, or attempts to define the activities of, some large vital service, which previously has been conducted for private profit, public opinion is at once asserted and criticism offered. That is true of electricity supply and the radio, and would be equally true should the railways, the cinema or the coal industry come under State control.

The more active interest taken in the conduct of public affairs and the more constructive criticism forthcoming from the public of the organisations which affect it most, the sooner does each individual appreciate the responsibility that lies on his shoulders as a member

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of the community. Only class-distinction, the root evil of our educational system, prevents the sincere co-operation of the members of the public with each other and provides an insurmountable barrier to the general endeavour of social advance.

On first consideration you would imagine that education has as its primary aim the equipping of the mind for citizenship, but upon reflection it is found that such a conception is quite different from that which actually obtains. In fact, there is every reason to believe that our educational system as a whole imparts neither the essential facts nor the inspiration required for the proper training of the mind for the duties of citizenship. To quote an educationalist who has the vision to observe these shortcomings:

‘It should, then, be the aim of education for citizenship to equip the citizen for the “choice before him” so that he may support the better rather than the worse general policy. It should, indeed, be possible, even while still at school, and certainly later, to put before him the main facts and principles, whether these be moral, economic or political, which lie behind the chief questions of the day. It should be possible, for instance, both to explain the reasons, and to instil in him the desire for international co-operation rather than for nationalistic self-sufficiency; for the peaceful settlement of international disputes and disarmament rather than for the use of force—without finding it necessary to explain in detail the technique of the League of Nations or of any particular aspect of disarmament....

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'But the recognition of the need for deliberately training young people at school or college for their vocation as citizens is still far from being general, and too many heads of schools appear still to present insuperable difficulties with regard to the lack of time, to lack of qualified teachers, to the dangers of political bias and the like. This means that now and for some time to come at least, we shall have a generation of adults which has had little training for citizenship in school other than the generalised training of adaptation to life in a community and of loyalty to a particular institution. We cannot afford to wait. So unfitted is our present population to grapple with its problems and to help democratic institutions to work well, that the functions of the adult education movement in trying to make up for the deficiencies of school education in this respect is of urgent and vital importance.'¹

It is true, of course, that as far as training the mind to read, write and figure, the present system is satisfactory. The imparting of technical knowledge for specialised professions is also, apart from possible minor improvements of method, comparatively successful. While there is much preoccupation, especially in schools of the 'higher' type, with training the mind to cultural ends in the belief that an intimacy with dead languages, a respect for ancient books, a catalogue of the world's past events, a grasp of higher mathematics and occasionally an admiration for traditional

¹ Eva M. Hubback writing in *Adult Education* (pp. 55-56), September 1934.

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and obsolete forms of art will contribute to the adult's cultural status. On the grounds of sport, admitting its value in the development of physical fitness, education is safe within established rules, hence the fetish which games have become in at any rate the 'upper class' schools.

Two real aims, we may suspect, underlie these educational methods. Firstly, the development of the citizen in such a way that he or she will be fitted to secure personal achievement in the world at large. Secondly, the bringing up of the potential citizen in such a manner that he or she will accept and revere without criticism all those political, social and economic beliefs which are to the advantage of the class that controls education. In no way whatsoever does our educational system to-day bring up the child to play an important part in social and political improvement except in an acceptance of things as they are without question. How the child, and in particular the working-class child, is expected to reconcile what it is taught in school with what it sees at home and in the world about it, is a point of interest.

More recently it has been recognised that there is need to prepare the child to become a good voter, a need that has somewhat unwillingly been forced upon educationalists by an era of political democracy. But far from providing the growing child with an elementary knowledge of the actual machinery of our political and social structures, indicating its origins and possible drawbacks, education has done all in its power to prevent any suspicion being aroused that the

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controlling system is anything but adequate, or that the world is conducted on any but the most successful lines. To do so would naturally lay open to criticism many of the principles upon which our modern society is built.

Thus instruction in politics, sociology, economics and the like, is relegated for the most part to meaningless generalisations, which in this way succeed in remaining non-controversial and harmless to the existence of the present system.

Is there, then, any wonder that the influencing of public opinion in Britain to-day is shared largely among the owners of the big national dailies, with their hirelings of professional sportsmen, advertisement writers, bigoted ecclesiastics and disappointed politicians; the entertainment-minded film producers; and a radio organisation which, whatever its faults, at least maintains a degree of responsibility more serious than the cinema or press? Neither of the latter is calculated to bring about a greater efficiency in the populace or inspire an urge for social advance so long as they are conducted on a private profit-making basis only; nor is it easy to believe that their exploiters have any intention to improve social conditions or build common aspirations while there remains money to be made from exploiting the uncultured sides of human nature.

In brief there exists to-day, on the one hand, an urgent need for the stimulation of wide interest among the public in matters of national and international significance and, on the other, a gradual

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ripening of social consciousness among a small but increasing minority. There is no question, however, that if the future development of civilisation is to proceed with any prospect of security and social progress, a great deal must be done to spread knowledge about the simple workings of government and the essential facts of our economic and social ways and means. For, as Mr James Harvey Robinson so admirably puts it: '...if certain seemingly indisputable historical facts were generally known and accepted and permitted to play a daily part in our thought, the world would forthwith become a very different place from what it is now. We could then neither delude ourselves in the simple-minded way we do now, nor could we take advantage of the primitive ignorance of others. All our discussions of social, industrial and political reform would be raised to a higher plane of insight and fruitfulness.'¹

Now the third and fourth decades of this century have seen the universal rise of two new and immensely powerful instruments for the imparting of knowledge. Radio and cinema, jointly or separately, represent the biggest revolution in instructional methods since the introduction of the printing-press. Both have been available to such purpose during a sufficient period of years for some specific use to have been made of their resources. So our next point of enquiry might well be to investigate in what manner and to what extent the film, with which we are here primarily

¹ *The Mind in the Making*, James Harvey Robinson (Cape), 1921.

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concerned, has been used to meet requirements of social service.

(ii) ECONOMIC BASIS AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Before speculation as to its influences and possibilities, before probing its values and scope, before tracing its growth and use, it is essential that we should first emphasise cinema's fundamental dependence on mechanical apparatus.

Film, in its original mute form, depends for existence on the scientific constitution of sensitised emulsion and the mechanical functions of camera, processing and projection. The act of representation is wholly mechanical. For this reason, whatever its claims to artistic or instructional virtues, the film must always be primarily regarded as a problem in economics. Not only has this meant that its development must have been controlled by the laws of production and distribution, but its subjects and to some extent its styles have necessarily been influenced, if not dictated, by commercial speculation.

It is a matter of common observation that cinema has been developed as an industry on lines similar to those obtaining in any other branch of modern manufacture. That is to say, its guiding factor has been production for private profit. Description of its growth as a universal provider of public entertainment by the shrewd minds of its pioneer exploiters has been

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attempted elsewhere.¹ Let it suffice to repeat that during the last thirty-five years the manufacture and selling of films have more and more been conducted along the lines of prevailing methods of big business, with the financial reins held tighter and tighter by large-scale capitalists. The fact that it supplies amusement on a wide basis, coupled with its mechanical ability for repeated performances at little extra cost beyond the original outlay on production, has naturally meant that all the paraphernalia of mass-production—departmental systems and scientific costing—has been introduced in an attempt to make cinema to-day conform with other large-scale manufacturing processes, such as those concerned with motor-cars or canned goods. Because it offers the opportunity for making profit on a big scale, film production proceeds on an economic policy of quick receipts in a short period of time. Only such rapid methods of trading can possibly justify its claims to extravagance, its battalions of highly-paid executives, and its middlemen and retailers who live by handling and exhibiting the product, and at the same time fulfil the hopes of its monied investors. Such methods, outrageous in any other age but our own, have inevitably led to inflated wages, often far in excess of the exchange value of the actual work performed, and to the fabric of ballyhoo maintained to keep the public 'film conscious'. As a cultural result, film stars have become the mythology of the twentieth century; film factories the modern Parnassus.

¹ See: Gilbert Seldes's *The Movies and the Talkies* (Lippincott), 1931, and this author's *The Film Till Now* (Cape), 1930.

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Cinema as an industry gives entertainment to the people. In its natural search after maximum receipts, the Trade is of the logical opinion that its films should appeal to the supposed largest proportion in any cinema audience, and hence that their intellectual value should coincide with the common factor of public thought. Believing this to be the most effective method by which the greatest number of pockets and purses may be reached, adequately supported by publicity and concessions to public ease and comfort, the major portion of the Industry's time and money has been spent in perfecting the manufacture and sale of one branch of cinema—the illustrated story derived from theatrical and literary tradition. So far has this field been exploited, so accurately has public taste been measured, that even stories in turn have been reduced to a limited set, each with its 'appeal' formula analysed and tabulated. No matter our views, we must admit that cinema has been developed by shrewd minds from what once appeared to be a toy to become one of the giant industries of the world, with its products displayed in almost every town, village and country in at least four out of the five continents.

So omnipresent, in fact, has the film become that it must be regarded as one of the most influential factors in the guidance of public thought, for there is scarcely a sphere of social life to-day in which its influence is absent. In the course of his valuable collection of data regarding the influence of films on child minds, for example, Mr Blumer makes the following pertinent remarks:

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‘Some young men and women, because of their attitudes and background of experience, regard the life of modern youth as it is shown in motion pictures not only as an “ideal” type of life but as the proper type of life. From such pictures they are likely to derive ideas of freedom, of relations to parents, and of conduct towards one’s associates. In this way motion pictures give *sanction* to codes of conduct and serve as an instrument for introducing the individual into a new kind and area of life.’¹

Whether we like it or not (and Mr St John Ervine does not) there is every possibility that the cinema wields as great if not greater power than the printed word. Certainly visual expression wedded to aural utterance, backed by countless performances, commands a wider and swifter urgency than the radio or the theatre. And when the extent of the social influence that is at the command of the film controllers is fully realised, we can at once appreciate how important becomes their place in framing the public’s cultural outlook in present and future decades. In this country alone, you may recall, over eighteen million people go to the cinema every week and in one year the film-going public pays over £40,000,000 to the cinemas.²

Thus, while fully acknowledging that this great industrial machine of cinema is one of the outstanding features of our age, while admitting its valuable

¹ *Movies and Conduct*, Herbert Blumer (Macmillan), 1933.

² Mr Simon Rowson before the Economic Science Section of the British Association, September 1934.

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functions as a means of recreation and amusement, at the same time we have yet to discover precisely what social use has been made of its vast powers.

It is not my intention here to add to the already numerous attacks which have recently been made on cinema as an 'evil influence'. That has been adequately investigated and published in the series 'Motion Pictures and Youth' by the American Motion Picture Research Council. I would simply say that in their pursuit of profit, the manufacturers of the entertainment film have, perhaps unwisely, confined most of their efforts to exploiting some of the worst sides and cheapest aims of modern society. There are, of course, exceptions. Yet taken as a whole, not only does the story-film to-day spend its time in reflecting the least important aspects of a capitalist society but it is often made to do so in a cynical or unintelligent fashion. There are certain features of the present system which are of direct benefit to general social advance but they are seldom seen reflected in the current story-film. Far from suggesting better aspirations and higher standards of thought, the amusement film pursues a course which is often harmful to social interests; a fact that has not passed unnoticed by the upholders of the present social system themselves, as witnessed by the remarkable manifestation of the American League of Decency. The star-system, for example, one of the cinema's most anti-social processes, admirably illustrates the methods employed not only to deaden the audience to reality, and to prevent it from relating anything seen on the screen to the actualities of modern

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life, but to encourage deliberately the worship of the ego.

Perhaps it is true that the minds which order the policies of film production and distribution are unaware of their social responsibilities. Perhaps, so long as the Industry continues on a satisfactory paying basis, they are not seriously concerned with the effect of their product on the audiences of the world. It is the more generous attitude for us to adopt. But at the same time we must not forget that it is to the advantage of a dominant class to produce and perfect a form of indirect propaganda for the preservation of its interests. All institutions, whether political, sociological or aesthetic, fundamentally reflect and assist in the maintenance of the predominating interests in control of the productive forces of their particular era. To this the cinema is no exception.

Hence it is clear that, under present policies of production, we cannot expect any film to deal impartially with such vital subjects of contemporary interest as unemployment, the problem of the machine, slum clearance, the relation of the white man to the native, or the manufacture of armaments. To do so would be to lay open to criticism some of the fundamental principles upon which modern society stands and for which the cinema, consciously or unconsciously, must act as a sort of deodorant.

For the same reason we can experience no surprise at the treatment of all working-class figures or coloured peoples, either as creatures of fun or as dishonest rogues, in current story-films, because it is to the

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ultimate interest of the dominant class that the spectator should regard them as such. You have only to observe the resentment of a working-class audience to the screen interpretation of one of themselves to realise my point.

The fact is that under the limits defined by the present economic system, entertainment cinema cannot possibly hope to deal either accurately or impartially from a sociological point of view with any of the really important subjects of modern existence. It is my contention, moreover, that whilst developed under the demands of financial speculation alone, cinema is unable to reach a point where its service to public interest amounts to anything more valuable than, as Mr Blumer has it, an emotional catharsis.

There is not a doubt, of course, that its temptations of substantial profit-making have definitely obscured cinema's larger but less glamorous purposes of social obligation. Indeed, we might most truthfully say that the film has never really been exploited on behalf of the public but primarily on behalf of private interests. Certainly, the Industry has yet to realise that the tremendous powers of the medium it controls are not without responsibility to aims other than that of mere private gain.

One fact emerges clear and salient from this discussion. If it is to fulfil our expectations as a power in the contemporary struggle for social advance, if it is to be instrumental in bringing about a greater public awareness for the urgent need of an economic and moral regeneration of the world, cinema must find an

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alternative economic basis for production to that of profit. To achieve this, it must be permitted to go outside the field at present exploited and be put to greater and more far-reaching uses than just amusement.

(iii) PROPAGANDA

From our earlier discussion of education and citizenship, it may have been gathered that illumination and propaganda are closely related. Propaganda, also, in a long-range sense, is very near to education and may be wisely interpreted as a task of development. In fact, so closely are the two interbound that in most cases it would be extremely difficult to define where instruction begins and propaganda ends. With this in mind, we may begin to suspect the interdependence of propaganda and instruction and to investigate their offer as a possible basis for film production.

In the same way that the nineteenth century saw the development of machinery for large-scale production of industry, so the last thirty years have seen the perfection of machinery to advertise the products of modern industry. The increased power of propaganda weapons since the War provides one of the most striking features of modern civilisation, but it is only recently that advantage has been taken of these formidable instruments by parties other than those concerned with industrial enterprise.

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The War undoubtedly began this era of mass-persuasion but the rapid development of the radio and the cinema, as well as the increasing influence exerted by the press, has subsequently trebled the importance of this new factor in the social structure. There can be little question that the immense persuasive properties of the two electric mediums—cinema and radio—have played an incalculable part in the shaping of mass-thought in post-war Europe. It is being generally recognised, moreover, that propaganda may become, as indeed in some countries it already is, one of the most important instruments for the building of the State. It is surely only a matter of time before the State will make full and acknowledged use of education, radio, cinema, pulpit and press to ensure public reception of its policies. Russia, Italy and Germany have already taken this course by their adoption of their particular system of government.

You cannot help but observe the organisation in Russia of all channels of expression to serve one prescribed propagandist end. Even more remarkable, perhaps, is the result of the astonishing propaganda drives organised in Germany by Goebbels, to whose understanding of the use of modern publicity mediums combined with his abilities for showmanship must be attributed some of the present popularity of the Nazi ideal. While the Italian methods of indirect State control over press, radio and film, exemplify the tremendous significance which the new authoritarian States place upon the instruments of propaganda. Schools, universities, cinema, radio—every conceivable agent

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of propaganda—are pressed into the service of the State to project its perfection.

With the exception of radio in Britain, however, the propaganda instruments in America and this country have been permitted to develop for the most part under the control of private enterprise. Only indirectly have they reflected the ideology of the system for which their users stand. But it is surely inevitable that, sooner or later, some fixed authoritative control will be exercised and it will be strange if it is not that of the State.

Now it is very obvious that, by reason of virtues inherent in its form, cinema is one of the most powerful channels of expression for persuasion and public illumination. Its peculiar suitabilities as an instrument of propaganda are almost too patent to specify. In brief, it possesses:

- (1) An introduction to the public shared only by the radio, with a resultant power of mass suggestion,
- (2) Simple powers of explanation and capacities for making statements which, if presented with a craftsmanship that takes full advantage of artistic values, are capable of persuasive qualities without equal, and
- (3) Virtues of mechanised repeated performance to a million persons, not once but countless times a day, to-morrow and, if the quality is good enough, ten years hence.

By adopting propaganda as an alternative basis of production, not only might cinema serve the greatest possible purpose as a medium of almost unlimited

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potentialities and its films play an important part in the life of the State and its people, but production might enter into a freedom impossible to the entertainment film.

It is not unreasonable to suppose, then, that there is likely to be wide use made of the cinema in this country for the influencing of public opinion towards an acceptance of political beliefs; wider and more intelligent use, that is, than the amateurish efforts already made in this direction by the Conservative Party. But propaganda of this nature, of necessity dealing with controversial subjects, will demand production licence which will only be available where production takes place under Government or political party control and will be obviously outside the scope of general Trade activity. In this connection we may note that the documentary propaganda film, with which we are later to deal in full, had its origin in Britain in a Government Department and that the majority of significant experiments in documentary have so far come from a film unit organised under Parliamentary control.

Besides political propaganda, moreover, there are many aspects of national affairs and public relations which may call for national publicities through the medium of the film, in an attempt to build up mutual sympathy and understanding between the people and the work of the public services. That has already been attempted with considerable success and enterprise by the Post Office, a departure in publicity methods which has not escaped criticism by the Government

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itself, as well as by the Trade and the Individual.¹ And it is especially this type of film that demonstrates the close relations existing between propaganda and instruction for the awakening of civic consciousness among the public. Such activity, however, can mark only the beginning of the use of the film by the State and its political parties. There are a score of national services and departments that may ultimately take advantage of the possibilities of such far-reaching methods of propaganda.

Apart from State production, many subjects of a less controversial kind await bringing to life on the screen; less controversial, that is, so long as the director who handles the films in question is socially and politically in sympathy with the forces controlling production. Most branches of Industry—coal, steel, textiles, engineering, architecture, shipping and the rest—and most public services—water, electricity, gas, traffic, etc.—are ripe for film treatment. Civics presents a wide field for experiment. Religion, also, can provide interesting themes for propagandist projection. Travel Associations, Welfare Organisations, Health Bodies, Educational Groups, Trade Unions, Workers' Clubs, Co-operative Societies, Youth Organisations and many other official and semi-official bodies again provide extensions to what we might perhaps call the

¹ See: *Report from Select Committee on Estimates* (H.M. Stationery Office), 1934, Section 'Government Cinematograph Films'. Note the attitude of the Chairman towards the aims of public relationships as well as the tone of the evidence given by the Trade. See also an editorial in *The Listener*, 31 October, 1934, and its criticism of Post Office films.

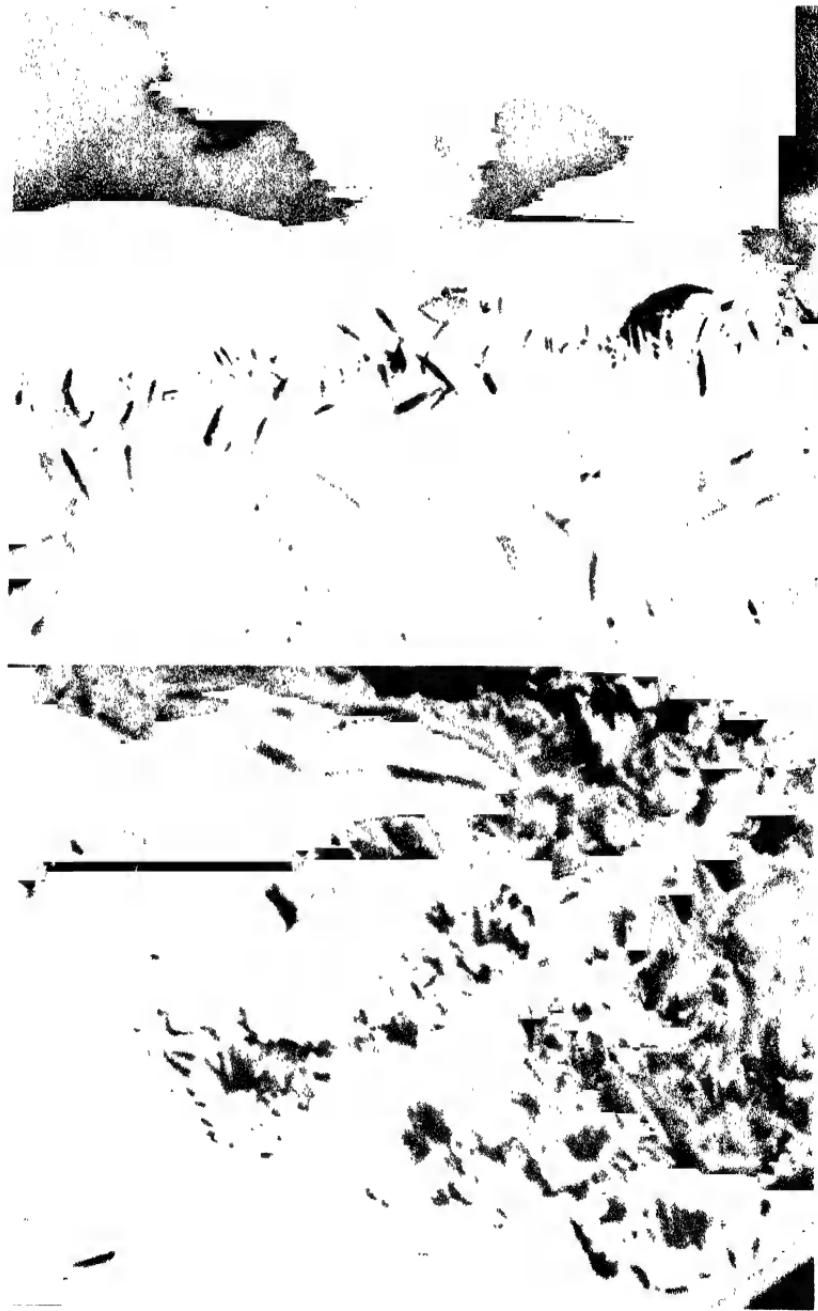
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non-entertainment field, each with its own propaganda to express and each requiring special treatment.

But since the production of such films as these falls outside the scope of any film unit organised by the Government, the question arises as to whether the Trade is sufficiently interested or, for that matter, really qualified to undertake production.

As we have seen earlier, the Trade has primarily been concerned with the development of the story-film and has exhibited but little real interest in other branches of the medium. There are occasional and notable exceptions, such as the Fox *Magic Carpet* series, Andrew Buchanan's *Cinemagazine* and the *Secrets of Nature* items, but even these are made with one eye on the accepted definition of box-office. In the field of directly commissioned propaganda films, also, the Trade has not until recently displayed any particular enthusiasm. Regrettably enough, where such films have been made, especially of the industrial type, they have most often been regarded by the Trade more as an easy means of making profit than as an opportunity to develop a new branch of cinema. For some years industrial firms have commissioned films to be made on the disgraceful basis of so-much per foot, cut-to-measure without skill or thought, with the lamentable result that to-day, and I speak with experience, many leading industrialists look upon the film still as a magnificent medium of publicity, but upon its exponents as so many tricksters. With the gradual appearance of better quality pictures along documentary lines, mostly brought into being without Trade





SPRING COMES TO ENGLAND (Taylor)

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assistance, this attitude on the part of the industrialist is slowly disappearing, but the Trade as a whole has still a great deal to learn before it will succeed in re-enlisting the full confidence of the big industries in this country.

There is, in fact, an increasing tendency for industrial and other firms, as well as semi-official bodies as those mentioned above, to enter into film production themselves, often in some sort of alliance with an existing Trade organisation but upon such a basis that supervision is vested in their own hands. In such cases, it is remarkable the degree of understanding of film matters which has been displayed by non-Trade minds. In fact, it might almost be said that within recent years the industrialists, including shipping companies and the like, have been greatly responsible for developing the quality as well as making possible the production of many cultural and documentary films. *The Voice of the World*, *Contact*, *Shipyard* and *Sea Change* are examples. They have been quick to realise that they might be better served by the employment of individual film makers or collective units rather than by the allocation of their films to commercial companies; and it must be said on their behalf that considerable discretion has been exercised in the selection of the film makers into whose hands the product has been entrusted. For, as opposed to the making of story-films, the production of successful propaganda and documentary films is wholly a matter of the capabilities of the individual producer, a point which will emerge very clearly as our survey proceeds.

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Assuming that the production of such films is possible, what place, if any, are they to occupy in the public film programme? With few exceptions it would seem that the film renter is in no way inclined to distribute non-story films except as pendants to his feature pictures. He is incapable of realising that salesmanship of such films differs in every possible way from the salesmanship of sex. With the complexities of the latter he is fully acquainted, but the more responsible purposes of cinema evoke a mistrust born of fear. The exhibitor presents a similar case. Despite the obvious demand for films dealing with contemporary matters, despite the increasing interest of the public in national and international affairs, evidenced both by the success already attending such films and by the experiments in book publishing and radio talks, the exhibitor still thinks in terms of story-pictures and remains deaf to the widespread criticism so frequently made of the supporting part of his programmes.

Where non-story films of a high quality have so far succeeded in making their appearance in the cinemas, most often they have been thrown in as make-weights, sometimes in an abridged form. In consideration of such circumstances, it is amazing what progress has been made and what wide attention has been evoked among the public and the press by these films. In some cases they have been more popular and received greater publicity than the expensive main-feature picture which they were meant to support. *B.B.C: The Voice of Britain* is an example. Two factors could undoubtedly aid the exhibition of these pictures in the

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immediate future. Firstly, the spread of the news-theatre and interest-theatre movement; secondly, the possibility of an adoption of the single-feature programme in large cinemas, necessitating a demand for first-class short films. Even then, this sort of half-hearted distribution is of no permanent value. Sooner or later someone has got to undertake the proper exploitation of non-fictional short pictures, sell them on their own merits, and once and for all destroy this absurd idea that short films are merely fill-ups. But, assuming this properly organised distribution of seriously made non-fiction films, what is likely to be the public's response?

The human race, it is true, displays an amazing aptitude for accepting the most familiar things of daily life. Yet if someone sits on a flagpole for three days, or if the Atlantic is flown by a deaf mute in half a day, whole nations present an appetite for the details as to how and why the feat was accomplished, while the firm that made the boots, or supplied the red-flannel stomacher which assisted the hero in his task, makes huge profits from the advertisement. But the marvellous organisations that make our daily lives a possibility, that bring food to our tables, telephones for rapid communication, mechanically reproduced music to entertain us, methods of transport to carry us, newspapers to inform us, heat to warm us and light for us to see by, as well as the multitude of services that conduct our days and nights, all these are accepted under our present social conditions without question until such a moment when we are reminded of them by their sudden

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absence. Such an attitude, of course, may again be traced to the inadequacy of our educational system.

But it is gratifying to find that where the cinema has explored this field, particularly in the bringing to life of the public services, such as the late E.M.B. and the present G.P.O. films attempt, public interest is forthcoming. Far from resenting the instructional element, there is overwhelming evidence of the audience's interest in such, although it is still a hard task to persuade the cinema exhibitor or renter of its existence. Nevertheless, despite their present restricted field of theatre exhibition, films of the working of the telephone system or of the running of the far-flung air-routes have attracted considerable attention and have begun to build up an audience more stable than that accumulated by the story-film.

So far we have dealt only with the adult theatre audience. But documentary is going much further than the four thousand odd theatres in Britain. It is going to find an ever-broadening field in the non-theatrical market. The hundreds, soon to be thousands, of portable projectors, both standard and sub-standard, will rely to a great extent upon the non-fiction film for their programmes. At present we are at the stage where clubs, associations, societies, guilds, unions, institutes, universities, schools and lecture groups, to say nothing of industrial firms and Government Departments, are thinking of purchasing projection equipment. There is also the projector for private use, just as there is the radio and the gramophone. Here again the non-story film will find fresh demands, for not all people will

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show in their homes the kind of story-film that they see in the public cinemas, even if such are available for hire to them.

It is this huge non-theatrical field of portable standard and sub-standard projectors that naturally holds the greatest interest for the propagandist, this potential audience of school children and students. This is where persuasions are most likely to be persuasive, where response is most likely to be forthcoming. Thus we find big industrialists to-day launching great campaigns of publicity films (Morris, Ford, Cadbury, Daimler, the Electrical Development Association are examples), some well made, some extremely bad; and, in wise cases, setting up their own film units as with the British Commercial Gas Association. Thus we find political parties despatching fleets of projection-vans up and down the country, as well as establishing special propaganda committees with programmes in which films are announced to play a large part. Thus we find bodies such as the Travel and Industrial Development Association possessing their own film units, and educational bodies such as the National Union of Teachers commissioning films to be made. Thus, more and more, do we find evidence of the film playing a prominent part in national life, in a sphere quite different from that of the ordinary entertainment film.

Certainly we may accept the fact that, in the course of time, projector groups will spring up all over the country, not only sponsored by propaganda groups for their particular ends, but organised among the public itself in the shape of film guilds and societies.

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At present the Trade exhibitor and renter (with rare exceptions) is inclined to ignore the presence of the film-society movement. The theatre queues are still sufficiently large to obscure a long-range vision. They are perhaps unwise. Public interest in the cinema is increasing with remarkable speed. Moreover, such interest is not wholly or even minutely inspired by what the Trade would call 'highbrow' intentions. The film-society movement (I speak with some experience) in the provinces of Britain is largely composed of ordinary persons drawn from every class and occupation. They are not all concerned with discovering the mythical 'art' of the film. They are not all what the Conservative newspapers would call 'Red hooligans'. They are working people of every description who have quietly permitted the exhibitor to look after his own queues and set out to do something for themselves about the kind of films they want to see. Not only are they gathering together to hold performances but they are slowly exercising an ever-widening influence on opinion generally. And this movement is not confined to Britain alone; it has spread to South Africa, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, America, and elsewhere.

The Trade is, of course, fully aware of the seriousness of this growth in the non-theatrical field and has probably considered various ways of checking its spread or, alternatively, of exploiting its progress. It might, for example, prohibit the hiring out of story-films except to theatres until such a time when the films should have lost interest. It might encourage and

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even inspire official action on the grounds that the non-theatrical field offends censorship or offers risk of fire. It might suggest that the growth of non-theatrical projector groups would encourage propagandas which were seditious. But by so doing it would only complicate its own position, because already several large Trade organisations have embarked on ambitious plans for the exploitation of this very field both from an instructional and entertainment point of view.

Within its limits, therefore, propaganda appears to present an alternative to the hard cash basis for film production. On some sides, it will doubtless be maintained that propaganda is a sterner end to serve than profit, that the demands of the propagandist will restrict even further the development of the film and the activity of its makers. I can hear it being said that the introduction of propaganda will once and for all destroy the claims of cinema to artistic virtue. I, also, once held that opinion.

(iv) FILM AS AN ART

Culture, sociologists inform us, is derived from the economic status of society. In the most primitive stages of civilisation the growth of culture springs from an expression of popular consciousness, necessitating the spending of energy on things other than the essentials of existence. As, however, the general wealth of society grows larger, so apparently does the acquisition of culture become more the exclusive right of the wealthy class. Hence, we find art departing more and

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more from its original function of providing objects useful to the community at large, and becoming a luxury relying on the patronage of the wealthy minority. Not until the general standard of living rises is the population, as a whole, again able to indulge in its desire for culture and do the arts again become popular. They do not, however, return to a reflection of popular expression but continue to portray tastes inspired by a superior economic position and create standards dictated by class snobbery. Thus the great mass of people to-day has been taught to regard a taste in the arts as an end in itself, bearing no relation to the ordinary things of everyday living, but the result of a cultural ideal set by the leisure tastes of the superior class.

Although all true artists create their most significant work by seeking inspiration in the common life of the people, they have rarely associated themselves with the community. They have sought and found elsewhere more fruitful acquaintance with wealthy patrons and bodies representative of the predominant system, although such an association has often meant a cap-in-hand approach. As civilisation has developed, so artists have departed more and more from their status as humble craftsmen serving the needs of mankind by making objects for practical purpose, and have tended to become romantic idealists, creating works of art primarily for contemplation, satisfying only personal ambitions under the publicity blurb that they are seeking some mystical goal which they describe in high-falutin' theory.

COAL FACE (Cavalcanti)



TELEPHONE WORKERS (Left)

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In this way the practice of the arts has become a matter of personal activity, detached from all social life, admirably suiting the cultural ideals set up by bourgeois aestheticism. The artist has become a man apart from other men, a human being with privileges denied the common mob, expressing and satisfying the whims of a small cultivated portion of society. Painting has become a trough of symbolism and all-in wrestling with the subconscious mind unintelligible to the majority. Poetry has become a private experience far removed from most reasonable understanding. A great deal of literature is concerned purely with the personal struggles and experiences of unimportant individuals, seeking satisfaction in an imaginary world devoid of human relationships on a significant scale. And where cinema has pretended to be an art in itself, with no other ends than its aesthetic virtues, it has slobbered and expired in a sepulchre of symbolism or, still worse, mysticism. You may recall, perhaps, that the films of the so-called German 'golden period' were enshrouded in deep mysticism and a revival of folk-superstition, borrowing from the expressionist theatre and cubist painting (*Caligari*, *Golem*, *Destiny* and *The Street*). It was not until such men as Pabst brought in the fresh air of social consciousness that the cobweb atmosphere of mystical mumbo-jumbo disappeared in a sink of mental and, incidentally, commercial bankruptcy. The same criticism may be applied to the arabesques of the French *avant-garde* group, the 'art' films of Russia and the occasional tit-bits that have come from America, like *Lot in Sodom*.

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Art, like religion or morals, cannot be considered apart from the materialist orderings of society. Hence it is surely fatal for an artist to attempt to divorce himself from the community and retire into a private world where he can create merely for his own pleasure or for that of a limited minority. He is, after all, as much a member of the common herd as a riveter or a glassblower, and of necessity must recognise his obligations to the community into which he is born. His peculiar powers of creation must be used to greater purpose than mere personal satisfaction. By its very abstraction, individualistic thought is sterile. Art is not a gift from some miraculous paradise but a contribution to a definite period of history. It has a marked purpose to serve at its time of origin, after which it becomes of sentimental value to be studied historically and as an example of skill. Great art is undying simply because its human interests appear to be of permanent value. Shakespeare, Leonardo, Holbein, Swift, Chaucer, Stendhal—each represents the intellectual developments of a particular ordering of society based on the productive relations of that society. Their styles, philosophies, and intellectual significances have root only in the social and economic conditions of their particular epoch. To us, to-day, certain of their work appears to live simply because each possessed an understanding of human values which is significant for every stage of society. But this expression of human understanding would never have become manifest if a special purpose had not been served at the same time. Their greatness is an offshoot,

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an overtone, of a task well done. These great works of art of the past would not have come into being only as a result of mere private speculation.

But in nearly all the fine arts to-day we find a purely individualistic aim, a cultivation of aesthetic feelings divorced from social means and ends. It is, perhaps, an inevitable condition in a civilisation that may be on the verge of a great social and economic change. It is the ultimate outcome of the refusal to face the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution, when artists fled to ivory castles of lofty idyllism and covered their faces before the onslaught of the machine and the smoke clouds of coal, coming forth only to salve the consciences of big business men by creating useless monstrosities from the profits of early industrial enterprise.

To-day, all that social and economic background is changed. But the artist, with the exception of a few writers and architects, still refuses to accept his real position in society, preferring instead to keep up this pretence of evasion. Hence, such survivals as the Royal Academy. Hence, the existence of these pretentious modern art groups. Your art-for-art's-sake, and there are plenty of them, will exclaim that the true artist is deserting art if you suggest that it should serve a definite purpose in the social sphere. It will be said that an artist is too strong spiritually to be socially conscious. In his mystic coma, your average intellectual is unable to see that this tendency towards social awareness arises purely from a cultural need, a long overdue liquidation of the old conception of art

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as an aesthetic ideal noble in its isolation. He will express horror at the thought of art being a social function, an approach to things other than from an artistic basis, a work which must be of practical purpose and not a mere mouthpiece of personal taste. And, if that attitude is still maintained, there is obviously no place for the artist in cinema.

There are, of course, still some people who speak of cinema as an art. Yet the most cursory study of modern production methods in the studio, the briefest analysis of entertainment film economics, must quickly indicate that the time when personal expression as opposed to mere technical style could find outlet, when the artist who had something to create could rise to a position where his work of art could be projected before a mass-audience, has passed away for good, if indeed it ever existed. Dictates of modern commerce, uttered by the financial controllers of the Industry, completely submerge the efforts of the individual (unless he become a harnessed Lubitsch or a despondent Clair) with the result that the story-film is nothing more or less than the mechanised product of factory workers. And while cinema is made to express the unimportant subjects it does, reflect the ideology of a hypocritical society, and continue to be divorced from the realities of this world in which it is made, its lack of artistic pretensions does not really matter.

The film, like all other forms of expression, is the outcome of social relationships that are conditioned by the material demands of existence. If it is to mean anything, if it is to survive, a film must serve a purpose

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beyond itself. That this purpose may be served honestly and competently, good craftsmanship is essential. The mistake of most cinematic method in the past has been the pursuit of craftsmanship for its own sake, for which the artist is not wholly to blame. We have seen, for instance, that the mechanical basis of the medium has meant development along accepted economic lines, thus, automatically, depriving the artist of his choice of theme. Secondly, in all but a few cases, the wealth of interesting technical experiment in this very young process has been sufficient to occupy the mind of the technician. Hence we find that in cinema's line-up there are many excellent examples of brilliant craftsmanship but scarcely any films which are outstanding for the contribution they make to modern society.

The big films of cinema, few as they are, have all served a special purpose and have not come into being primarily as the result of mere artistic endeavour or the desire to make profit. They are significant because of the sincerity of their creators in the part they were intended to play in social and political enlightenment. *Kameradschaft* and *Potemkin* are the two favourite examples. They were both propagandist.

Without this aim of special service, I cannot see that cinema has any real significance beyond that of providing a temporary emotional refuge for the community, making profit or loss for its moneyed speculators and preserving a record for future historical reference which will give a partly erroneous picture of our age.

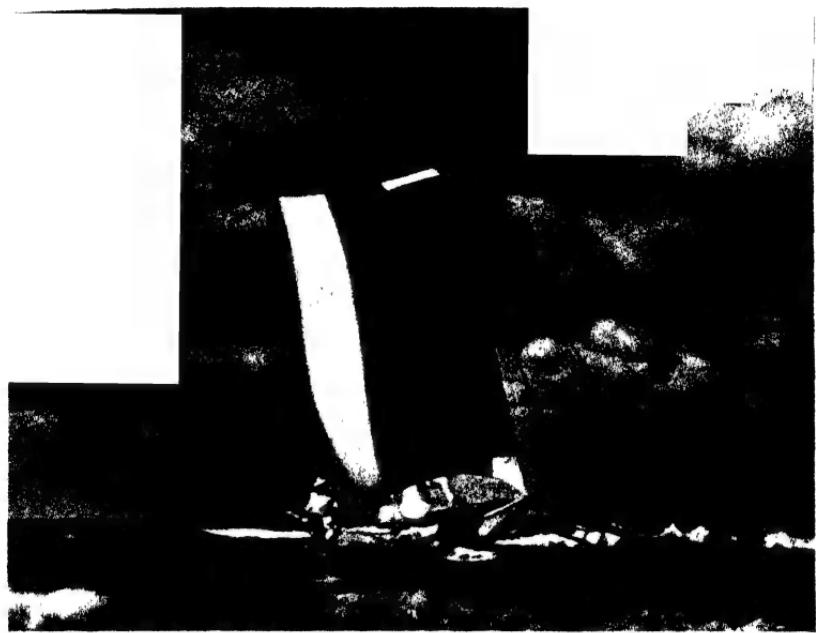
It is not as if the materials of cinema were inexpensive. On the contrary, in comparison with the humble

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requirements of the painter, poet or sculptor, the materials of camera, microphone, stock and other equipment are fabulous in price. Thus, for very obvious reasons, your individual artist cannot even begin to make his way in cinema without first establishing a firm economic basis.

At the same time, it is absurd to suggest that cinema, with its powers to enlarge the public's social conscience, to create new standards of culture, to stir mental apathies, to build new understandings and, by virtues inherent in its form, to become the most powerful of all modern preachers—it is absurd to suggest that it can be left in the hands of commercial speculators to be used as a vehicle for purposeless fictional stories. There must be a world outside that represented by the entertainment film. There must be sources of production other than those demanding only profit. There must be kinds of cinema and ends to serve other than those which portray an artificial world conceived under mass-production methods at the dictates of the balance sheet. There is—the world of propaganda and education.

Real and creative thought must be about real things. Let cinema explore outside the limits of what we are told constitutes entertainment. Let cinema attempt the dramatisation of the living scene and the living theme, springing from the living present instead of from the synthetic fabrication of the studio. Let cinema attempt film interpretations of modern problems and events, of things as they really are to-day, and by so doing perform a definite function. Let cinema recog-



THE SONG OF CEYLON (Wright)



BORINAGE (Storck & Ivens)

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nise the existence of real men and women, real things and real issues, and by so doing offer to State, Industry, Commerce, to public and private organisations of all kinds, a method of communication and propaganda to project not just personal opinions but arguments for a world of common interests.

(v) DOCUMENTARY

There is, then, every reason to believe that there lies ahead of cinema a tremendous field quite separate from that already developed along the lines of the story-film. New means of production, made possible by propaganda and instruction, open up new avenues of experiment. New methods of distribution and exhibition suggest new publics. New demands from education and publicity indicate new forms of film and new attitudes towards the materials of cinema.

This does not imply that the story-film as such has no place in cinema; that amusement, recreation, entertainment, call it what you will, is not an essential thing to the ordinary person; nor that cinema has not performed a vast function in making the theatre available to the masses by pursuing the line of photographed stage-plays. But it does most emphatically suggest that the story-film is not the be-all and end-all of cinema; that other kinds of film are as important, if not more important, in the long run than the fiction product of the commercial studios. The amusement film has a valuable place to fill in modern society but

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its function is not to deaden the social and civic conscience of the audience. The good story-film, especially in the field of comedy and satire and occasionally, very occasionally, in the lighter realms of fantasy, is as indispensable as the good novel or the good play. It is only when, for reasons of private gain and self-interest, it assumes the proportions of a menace, when it threatens to stifle all other methods of cinema, when it tends to become an anaesthetic instead of a stimulant that the story-film becomes dangerous.

But cinema has at last become alive outside the limits of the studio balance sheet. It has found temporary salvation in serving the ends of education and persuasion. It has found fresh air beyond the sound-and-idea-proof studios in what Grierson has called the 'creative treatment of actuality'. And among these new forms, somewhat beyond the simple descriptive terms of the teaching film, more imaginative and expressive than the specific publicity picture, deeper in meaning and more skilful in style than the news-reel, wider in observation than the travel picture or lecture film, more profound in implication and reference than the plain 'interest' picture, there lies Documentary. And the documentary method may well be described as the birth of creative cinema.

Two

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DOCUMENTARY**

Two

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What we have come to call 'documentary' did not appear as a distinct method of film making at any given moment in the cinema's history. It did not suddenly become manifest as a new conception of film in any particular production. Rather has documentary evolved over a period of time for materialist reasons; partly as the result of amateur effort, partly through serving propagandist ends, partly through aestheticism.

We have already observed that the major portion of the Industry's time has been spent in perfecting the production and sale of one kind of film—the illustrated story made largely in the studio. Relatively little thought has been given to the potentialities of other methods of cinema (except in such rare cases as the advent of a Disney and, even then, we may recall Disney's struggle before he gained commercial success), or to the possibility that the mass audience might be comprised of many different kinds of persons with a variety of outlooks.

As a direct consequence, the machinery of the film factories and the elaborate, sometimes efficient, system of salesmanship have been developed to deal with one type of film and only one. It might be extremely difficult for a film of a different type, should

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the public make apparent its desire for such, to receive adequate treatment from the Trade. Thus it is in no way surprising that when, on various occasions, new kinds of films have appeared, the Trade has not always been able to give them capable handling even though they may have possessed money-making possibilities.

For this reason, although they have frequently made their appearance, pictures dealing with natural subjects have seldom received the vigorous support of the Trade, nor has any really serious attention been paid to short pictures of an 'interest' type for their own sake. Short films have been regarded much as the proverbial gift with a packet of tea, as fill-ups and make-weights, often given away in handfuls with a major story-film. They are often issued in a disgraceful state of abbreviation. The copies are frequently mutilated or in a bad condition. They are seldom given the dignity of a press presentation. Not only this, but there are even cases when exhibitors, desiring to book certain short pictures, have found it almost impossible to do so. Most of the initiative for travel films has come from persons outside the Trade. It has resulted from individual amateur effort. There is no exaggeration in saying that two-thirds of the attempts to employ cinema for purposes other than fictional story-telling have come about from sources quite apart from the Film Trade.

Nevertheless, from quite an early date in cinema, such films have found their way into production. In face of the indifference of producing companies and renting concerns, the desire to use the film camera for wider aims than story-telling has increased and since

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the War there has been a steady growth in public enthusiasm for them.¹ The fact that the film camera and cinema screen have it in their power to show one half of the world how the other half lives has given birth to numerous simply-made travel pictures—such as the current FitzPatrick *Traveltalks* and the Fox *Magic Carpet* series—yet, until to-day, there has been little attempt to classify and analyse their respective virtues. But it was clear from these humble efforts that the film had every possibility of expressing something beyond fictional stories conceived and put on the screen by departmental methods.

By virtue of the camera's ability to record a reasonably faithful image, pictorial description was—and still is—the primary intention of these *documentaires*, as the French called them. Their real appeal lay in the obvious attraction of scenic material gathered from all parts of the world, interpreted by the academic skill of their photographers. Although a decided advance on the magic-lantern lecture, these *Voyage au Congo's* and *Everest's* and *Pamyr's* can hardly be said to add greatly to the film as a medium of creative power but at least they had the merit of exploring fresh territory.

The news-reel, of course, was also making use of the camera's reproductive capacities by building up an ever-changing panorama of daily events; not with much skill it must be confessed, for its value lay in speed, hazard and impudence. Nevertheless, its basic appeal

¹ The remarks of Captain F. S. Smythe regarding Film Trade methods in his book *Kemet Conquered* (Gollancz), 1933, are significant.

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again rested in presenting actual events in their actual surroundings. It was a method, albeit a crude one, of reporting.

Many other subjects crept into this growing field of non-story cinema, exploring the fascinating possibilities of the camera as fast as the necessary resources could be found. Cinemagazines of the Buchanan brand carried into celluloid the style and method of popular periodicals; sport was approached in personal interviews and skilful demonstrations of the underlying sciences, such as the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer series; microscopical cinematography investigated the phenomena of natural history and biology, notably in Percy Smith's *Secrets of Nature* and in Jean Painlevé's beautiful fish films; events of the World War were made to live again with suitable injections of patriotism, as in Bruce Woolfe's *Zeebrugge* and *Battle of Falkland and Coronel Islands*; experiments in science and medicine were recorded for the benefit of posterity, as in Canti's cancer film: all humble efforts at utilising cinema for more ambitious purposes than mere story-telling.

But the limits to which these pictures reach are scarcely sufficient for us to regard them as anything more than recorded facts, with no further virtue than their frequent use of naturally existing material and subjects in preference to the artificial conceptions of the studios. They make no effort to approach their subjects from a creative or even dramatic point of view, no attempt to govern the selection of images by methods other than those of plain description, no endeavour to express an argument or fulfil a special

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purpose. Nor do they fully explore the range of the reproductive properties of the camera and microphone and only occasionally attempt simple editing for a lucid presentation of facts with commentary to match.

The step that exists between this type of general 'interest' picture and the higher aims of the documentary method is wider than is usually imagined. Because these 'interest', travel and lecture films often embrace no story and make use of natural material, it is believed that they fall within the documentary grouping. The fallacy of this belief will, I hope, gradually become apparent during our closer survey of the evolution of documentary.

Without entering into complex technical discussion, it is nevertheless important to make clear, at this point, the fundamental distinctions that exist between the two methods of using the apparatus and materials of cinema.

One hundred years ago, the skill of a craftsman was the only means by which a pictorial record of a person, a place or an object, could be secured for pleasure or reference. To-day, that craftsmanship has been superseded by the science of photography.

From the first days of film production until the present, most story-film technique to have emanated from Western studios has been based on the fact that the camera could reproduce phenomena photographically on to sensitised celluloid; and that from the resultant negative a print could be taken and thrown in enlarged size by a projector on to a screen.

In consequence, we find that more consideration is accorded the actors, scenery and plot than the method

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by which they are given screen presence, a system of manufacture which admirably suits the departmental organisation of the modern film studio. Thus the product of the scenario, together with the accommodating movements of the camera and microphone, create numerous lengths of celluloid, which merely require trimming and joining in correct sequence, according to the original scenario, for the result to be something in the nature of a film. Occasionally, where words and sounds fail to give the required lapses of time and changes of scene, ingenious camera and sound devices are introduced. It is not, of course, quite so simple as this but, in essentials, the completed film is believed to assume life and breath and meaning by the transference of acting to the screen and words to the loudspeaker.

The skill of the artist, therefore, lies in the treatment of the story, guidance of the actors in speech and gesture, composition of the separate scenes within the picture-frame, movements of the cameras and the suitability of the settings; in all of which he is assisted by dialogue-writers, cameramen, art-directors, make-up experts, sound-recordists and the actors themselves, while the finished scenes are assembled in their right order by the editing department.

Within these limits, the story-film has *followed* closely in the theatrical tradition for its subject-matter; converting, as time went on, stage forms into film forms, stage acting into film acting, according to the exacting demands of the reproducing camera and microphone.

The opposite group of thought, however, while accepting the same elementary functions of the

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camera, microphone and projector, proceeds from the belief that nothing photographed, or recorded on to celluloid, has meaning until it comes to the cutting-bench; that the primary task of film creation lies in the physical and mental stimuli which can be produced by the factor of editing. The way in which the camera is used, its many movements and angles of vision in relation to the objects being photographed, the speed with which it reproduces actions and the very appearance of persons and things before it, are governed by the manner in which the editing is fulfilled. This applies equally to sound. Such a method presupposes that one mind assumes responsibility for the shape and meaning of the completed film, performs the editing as well as, in some cases, the photographing; a procedure which obviously does not fit smoothly into mass-production methods.

Within these limits, departure has been made *away* from the theatrical tradition into the wider fields of actuality, where the spontaneity of natural behaviour has been recognised as a cinematic quality and sound is used creatively rather than reproduc-tively. This attitude is, of course, the technical basis of the documentary film.

If dates will help, documentary may be said to have had its real beginnings with Flaherty's *Nanook* in America (1920), Dziga Vertov's experiments in Russia (round about 1923), Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* in France (1926), Ruttman's *Berlin* in Germany (1927) and Grierson's *Drifters* in Britain (1929). Broadly speaking, documentary falls into four groups, each of

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which demands individual estimate because each results from a different approach to naturally existing material.

(i) THE NATURALIST (ROMANTIC) TRADITION

That the use of natural scenery and everyday surroundings found a place in theatrical cinema in its earliest stages, that right up to the present day the natural exterior plays an important part in many story-films, is a matter of common observation. With very occasional exceptions, however, such realistic material has been employed only as a charming or, in some cases, spectacular background to the behaviour of the characters in a story and is not considered of primary interest for its own sake. Little attempt has been made, for instance, to relate characters to natural surroundings. The story is seldom inherent in the environment. Fictional situations and their imaginary protagonists are superimposed on authentic backgrounds interspersed with studio sets. Dramatic crises do not arise from the natural characteristics of the surroundings, but from the personal inclinations and motives of the fictitious characters. Backgrounds, like subjects, are frequently chosen only for their topical interest.

To this general observation some of the earlier work of Griffith is an exception, not in his avoidance of relating story to surroundings but in his recognition of the value of the elements for emphasis of the emo-



MAN OF THE FOREST (Hathaway)



THE COVERED WAGON (Cruze)

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tional experiences of the characters. You will remember the snow and ice in *Way Down East* and the natural backgrounds in early Pickford films. Sjöstrom, also, pursued a similar idea and in one picture used the wind as an outward visual emphasis of an inner mental struggle with sensitive imagination. To the Swedes, in fact, must go the credit of the first real imaginative use of the exterior in fiction films, long before the Russians or the Germans became aware of the virtues of the natural scene.

The most important use of authentic background in America was, of course, in the western film, which for so many years provided popular enjoyment for the world at large and which still can be found in the native compounds of South African gold-mines. Even the up-to-date sophisticated western often gives us the American film mind at its best. Yet still the selection of naturalistic material comes secondary to the exciting spectacle of gun-play and rodeos.

It is characteristic of the commercial cinema, however, that every now and again an epic picture will emerge, because the epic theme has immediate and valuable audience appeal. Man fighting his way across unbounded horizons, Man battling against primitive Nature, is assured of acclaim no matter if the achievement is decked out with amorous interludes or villainous counterplots.

Thus, when *The Covered Wagon* went into production as an ordinary western in 1924, and through some unique freak of fortune emerged as an epic of national endeavour, we find the American amusement film

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first making use of background for its own sake. This could not very well be avoided. The country, as well as the elements, was largely responsible for the conflict on which this theme of the great trek to the west was founded.

Admittedly *The Covered Wagon* was in the story-film class, admittedly it was a reconstruction of past events, admittedly it included situations primarily believed to be of commercial value, but, at the same time, its theme of grand endeavour was to greater purpose than mere fiction, with a direct although traditional relationship to national issues.

That its producers were incapable of diagnosing the reason for its success is suggested by the imitations by which it was followed. Improvements on the original were attempted. The endeavours were made more dangerous, the achievements more heroic and further fictional interest was added, thus showing that the magnates completely failed to appreciate that *The Covered Wagon*'s appeal lay in the essential simplicity of its epic theme. *The Big Trail* and *Fighting Caravans* are cases in point. *The Iron Horse* came nearer to success: another epic conception dealing with the giant task of throwing America's first railroad across the trackless wastes of the Continent against the obstacles of Nature and the hostility of the Indians; and we must remember also Karl Brown's film of Kentucky, *Stark Love*.

The naturalist tradition, however, was not confined to the western scene. Travel and adventure made their obvious appeal to independent photographers,



THE IRON HORSE (Ford)



CIMARRON (Ruqqles)

THE NATURALIST (ROMANTIC) TRADITION

who brought back from their expeditions remarkable records of strange life in the outer world for the edification of the curious town-dweller.

Most of these suffered a similar fate at the hands of the exploiting side of the Trade—either to be issued as romantic travel pictures with commercial dressing (*Grass*, *Chang*, *Rango*, *Pori*, *Tembi*, etc.), or actually interwoven with fictional incidents staged in Hollywood's always accommodating back-garden (*The Four Feathers*). Occasionally, forearmed with a knowledge of the picture-business's unique ideas of salesmanship, stories were invented on the spot, with such ingenuous results as Barkas's *Palaver* and Poirier's *Caïn*. Only an inherent instinct for photography, and a mentality that could observe the essential drama of Man's struggle against Nature, saved Robert Flaherty from joining the ranks of these wandering photographers.

During one of his expeditions for Sir William McKenzie of the C.N.R., into the Hudson Bay Territory and Baffin Land, Flaherty took with him a film camera. The results of his first efforts were destroyed by fire, but he paid a return visit in 1920 for Reveillon Frères, the furriers, to one of that company's trading posts at the mouth of the Inuksiuk River. There, with a walrus hunter as his main character, he settled down to make a film of the eskimos.

Nanook differed from previous and many later natural-material pictures in the simplicity of its statement of the primitive existence led by the eskimos, put on the screen with excellent photography (before the days of panchromatic emulsion) and with an imagina-

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tive understanding behind the use of the camera. It brought alive the fundamental issue of life in the sub-arctic—the struggle for food—with such imaginatively chosen shots and with such a sincere feeling for the community interests of these people, that it suggested far greater powers of observation than the plain description offered by other naturalistic photographers. Not merely did it reveal the daily struggle for life maintained by the eskimo people, but it demonstrated that the progress of civilisation depends upon Man's growing ability to make Nature serve a purpose, and by his own skill to bend natural resources to his own ends. The screen has probably no more simply treated, yet brilliantly instructive, sequence than that in which Nanook builds his igloo. In short, it established an entirely new approach to the living scene, forming the basis for a method of working which Flaherty has since developed.

The commercial success of *Nanook* (it was issued by Pathé) took Flaherty to the film magnates and he was offered a contract by Paramount (then Famous-Players) to go to the South Seas and bring back 'another *Nanook*'. This was the extent to which the profit-seeking minds of commercialdom could go with the naturalist conception.

In point of fact, of course, Flaherty was despatched to the South Seas in the belief that he would bring back a symphony of female nudity, such being the main asset of the native to the film producer. Instead, Flaherty returned with a sensitively composed idyll of the Samoans, a theme that showed how the native, in



MOANA (Flaherty)

STORM OVER TETRAS (Plicka)



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order to prove his manhood, created a ceremonial ritual of pain—the Tattoo.

If anything *Moana* (1926) was more carefully observed than *Nanook*. There was the beginning of those caressing camera movements, which were to find rich fulfilment in his later work, and that feeling for the poetry of natural things which is inborn in the true artist. Photographically, it was a revelation of the infinite latitude of panchromatic emulsion and was claimed to be the first full-length picture to be made on this stock.

More important, it demonstrated clearly Flaherty's personal methods of working:

‘...it became an absolute principle that the story must be taken from the location, and that it should be (what he considers) the essential story of the location. His drama, therefore, is a drama of days and nights, of the round of the year's seasons, of the fundamental fights which give his people sustenance, or build up the dignity of the tribe.’¹

In other words, the material for the theme must be observed at first-hand and absorbed into the mind before the film is actually started. This had scarcely been the case with any travel films preceding or contemporary with *Nanook* or *Moana*. And secondly, while the material used for the film is photographed from real life and is, in fact, recorded ‘reality’, by the selection of images, brought about by an intimate understanding of their presence, the film becomes an interpretation, a special dramatisation of reality and not mere recorded description.

¹ Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2.

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Moana was sold to the public by pimp salesmen as the 'love-life of a South Sea syren', prologued by stripped chorus girls and jangling guitars. Driven to desperation by this vulgar treatment of a thing which had taken two years of solid hard work to create, Flaherty turned salesman, at which he is no mean hand, and put over *Moana* in the six toughest towns in the United States by the simple procedure of organising the lecture and educational bodies as his audience. The Film Trade was surprised, but no wiser. The documentary method was then, as indeed now, a closed book to the big magnate.

There followed a brief contretemps with the Metro-Goldwyn company about a return visit to the South Seas, resulting in Flaherty's blunt refusal to accept the imposition of stars and a Hollywood story and the willing surrender of the film to a director more facile with his conscience (*White Shadows*). For a similar reason, a film for Fox about the Red Indian Rain Dance in New Mexico was abandoned after a preliminary investigation with a still-camera and, after some experimental colour work for Museum authorities in New York and a two-reeler of skyscraper symphonics (later used as a backcloth to dancing girls at the Roxy), Flaherty departed in company with the late F. W. Murnau, a German previously associated with studio films of the most formal type, once more for the South Seas.

There they made a romantic story of a youth who disobeys the tabu of his tribe and is pursued by the vengeance of the gods. *Tabu* had all the loveliness of its

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setting: canoes flashing in the sunlight and ceremonial dances by graceful maidens against a background of rolling seas and golden sands, but it was obvious that Flaherty's method of approach was at discord with Murnau's studio-trained mind. The film degenerated into a beautiful lyrical description of a distant legend of forgotten importance.

Presently Flaherty came to Europe. After playing awhile with the craftsmanship traditions of the Black Country at the invitation of the E.M.B. (*Industrial Britain*), he was commissioned by the Gaumont-British Picture Corporation to bury himself in one of the Aran Islands off the Irish coast and bring back a film.

Being the most recent example of the romantic school, *Man of Aran* gives us the idyllic documentary method at its most developed. In it Flaherty fulfils every wish which has prompted his idealist mind since the early days of *Nanook*. Nearly two years in production, he found on this rugged island a perfect location for the Flaherty method—a place where Man could be observed in all his primitive philosophy of living, epitomised by the eternal struggle against his enemy, the Sea. The conflict between Man and Nature has never before been so well staged, nor have the visual qualities of sea and wave been so well photographed. We see the islanders, or at least a handful of them, scraping precious scraps of soil from the rocky surfaces to make gardens for their crops. We see a shark hunt, thrillingly contrived, to provide oil for the cottage lamps. We see father, mother and son relentlessly

THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

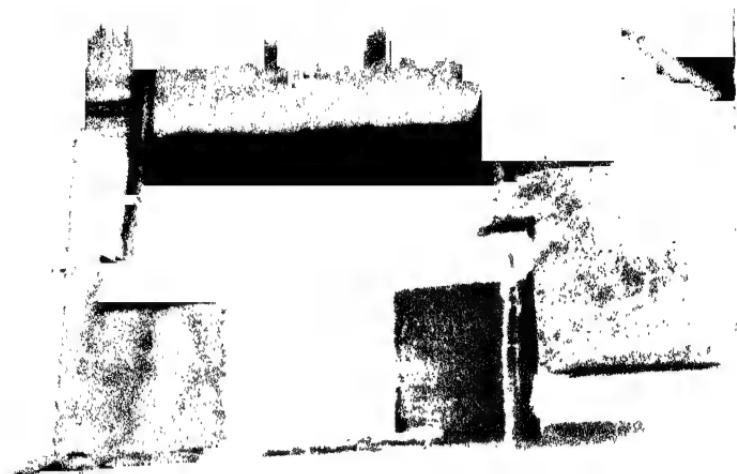
pursuing the ancient struggle and are left suspended in the teeth of the storm as the battle goes on.

There are moments when the instinctive caressing of the camera over the natural movements of a boy fishing, or of men against the horizon, bring a flutter to your senses; so beautiful in feeling and so perfect in reproduction that their image may seem indelible. And again there are moments when you recollect your thoughts and wonder whether dawdling over a woman carrying wet seaweed across the beach, beautiful in itself to behold, is really important. It might be that two minds had disagreed, each seeking the major issue of the theme and each finding a different solution. The sharks for the box-office; the sea for the sentimentalist. But the absence of any artificial narrative is, at any rate, a final justification for documentary. Here is the living scene (as it appeared to Flaherty) recreated in terms of living cinema. Here is the camera handled to bring out the very essence of this dramatic struggle for existence. Here is Man stripped of all time fighting Sea and Rock. Here is the perfect idyllic conception of the romantic mind, drawing on natural material and natural people for its screen interpretation.

Add to these films of Flaherty Epstein's *Finis Terrae*, a psychological approach to a quarrel among four fishermen harvesting kelp on the island of Bannec off Brittany, perhaps the Czech *Storm Over Tetras* and one or two other romanticisms, such as the lyrical visions of Walter Creighton, and our estimate of the romantic tradition will serve. An evolution through the use of exteriors in the theatrical film to the epic western and

FINIS TERRAE (Epstein)





RIEN OUE LES HEURES (Cavalcanti)

THE NATURALIST (ROMANTIC) TRADITION

travelogue; to simple observations of peoples, things and places in descriptive terms for which the camera is so well equipped; thus to Flaherty and the idyllic romantic theme of Man against Nature in the remote backwaters of the modern world.

(ii) THE REALIST (CONTINENTAL) TRADITION

The realist approach to actually existing material and themes springs, in the first place, from the *avant-garde* film makers in France, who, hypnotised by the facile tricks of the movie camera, produced for their own edification many short films dealing with one or other aspect of Parisian or provincial French life. Seldom profound but often witty, these pastiches were inspired by nothing more serious than kindergarten theory, their observations on the contemporary city scene being limited to obvious comparisons between poor and rich, clean and dirty, with a never-failing tendency towards the rhythmic movements of machinery and the implications of garbage cans. Providing excellent fodder for the film societies, these films were the typical product of an art-for-art's-sake movement. You may recall *Marche des Machines*, *Menilmontant* and *Emak Bakia* among the best. Only one figure, Cavalcanti, and one film, *Rien que les heures*, upon which most of the other films were based, emerged of real documentary interest.

Shot in four weeks at a cost of 25,000 francs, this

THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

first of the 'day in the life of a city' cycle preceded Ruttmann's *Berlin* by several months, although the latter film achieved premier public showing in Britain and America, thereby robbing Cavalcanti of much of his credit. *Rien que les heures* will be remembered as depicting the passage of time during a day in Paris, the same characters reappearing at different times and at different tasks. It was the first attempt to express creatively the life of a city on the screen.

Clumsy in construction to modern eyes, perhaps, particularly in its cutting, nevertheless in 1926 it broke fresh ground. It presented the possibility of interpreting the reality about us, as opposed to the sentimental idyll in remote parts of the Flaherty method. *Man against Nature* in distant islands marked the one purpose; *Man against the Street*, against the turmoil of the City, marked the other. Cavalcanti may have failed, at the time, to bring a full social realisation to the latter aim, may have lacked the vision to bring a cross-section of a City to the screen, but at the least *Rien que les heures* put us in touch with modern experience, attempted the dramatisation of familiar things in familiar surroundings, and in this small measure deserves recognition.

In some ways similar to Cavalcanti's film, Ruttmann's *Berlin* was in the making for eighteen months during 1926-7 as a Kontingent picture for Fox, in the conception of which Karl Mayer, former scenarist of many famous story-films, and Karl Freund, artistic photographer, are credited with assistance.

With a fine swing it took us along the awakening

THE REALIST (CONTINENTAL) TRADITION

suburbs into the city, where the day begins with revellers returning to and workmen leaving their homes. Presently, with much raising of blinds and opening of windows, the city gets to work, with a heavy traffic emphasis and the usual absorption with machines. Midday brings food; and a mixture of contrasts, from class to class, till again work is resumed and a passing downpour of rain and a suicide fill in the afternoon. Transition to nightfall and the myriad amusements of the city worker, poor and rich, wind up to an abrupt and unsatisfying climax.

Ruttmann gained richly from the cutting methods of the Soviets. It was upon cutting and tempo that *Berlin* relied chiefly for its symphonic effect. That is why the opening, with its nicely moving images of wheels, rails, telegraph wires, couplings and landscapes, came across better than the observations of the city itself, which were prompted more by an aesthetic approach to the appearance of the scene than by the significance underlying it. But its importance in our estimate lies in marking a step still further away from the limits of the theatrical film, a still more exciting approach to reality which stirred our senses by its tempos and movements.

Since *Berlin* advanced the symphonic method of construction, there have been many attempts along similar lines to use everyday material for documentary films, mostly based on striving towards a final beauty of superficial observation of the modern scene. Commerce and industry of every description, cities and suburbs, traffic in air, on land and sea, great achieve-

THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

ments of science and engineering, all these have been covered by the roving camera.

Ivens, the Dutchman, spent copious footage on the reclamation of the Zuiderzee, became involved over the mechanically created climax of *The Bridge*, created yet another spilling of water in *Rain*, took advertisement a rung further up the artistic ladder with *Philips-Radio* and departed to Russia for new ideas and locations, which he would appear to have found in a film for the League of Youth Movement, *Komsomol*, in which he reveals a completely new sociological outlook. Storck was another, more strictly of the *reportage* school, with his sensitively handled *Idylle à la plage* and fancifully shot *Images d'Ostende*. Basse was a third, closer to the Ruttmann school, with his *Abbruch und Aufbau*, *Markt in Berlin* and the ponderous *Deutschland von Gestern und Heute*. Hackenschmied's symphonics of *Prague Castle* falls in the same class. To say nothing of the new French group which has sprung up since the coming of sound—Aurenche's wittily shot *Pirates du Rhône*, Alexandre's descriptive and solemn *Un Monastère*, and Lods's rather poorly conceived *La Vie d'un Fleuve* and more interesting *Le Mil* with its imaginative use of sound. Ruttmann himself has continued to build on the symphonic basis of *Berlin* with the somewhat confused issues but well-tempo'd *World Melody* and the superficially approached drama of steel, *Acciaio*, for the Italians.



NEW GROUND (Ivens)



MAN WITH THE MOVIE CAMERA (Vertov)

THE NEWS-REEL TRADITION

(iii) THE NEWS-REEL TRADITION

The ordinary twice-a-week news-reel has little in common with the characteristics of the documentary film except that they both go to actuality for their raw material. The news-reel's job is to present in simple descriptive terms and within the minimum of time the events of the day, in itemised form without bias or special viewpoint. Documentary's task, on the contrary, is the dramatisation and bending to special purpose of actuality, a method that demands time for thought and time for selection. Often, it is true, the subject-matter of news-reel is dramatic in itself, such as the launch of a liner or events relating to a political crisis,¹ but the cinematic approach to this material by the news-reel cameramen and editors is strictly descriptive and seldom creative. The material of news-reel, however, shot on the spot, has at various times given rise to pointed *reportage* and montage films that fall within the broad interpretation of documentary.

Best known of such work is, of course, the Kino-Eye theory of Dziga Vertov and his group of co-workers in the U.S.S.R. To quote from previous description: 'The object of the Kino-Eye is to build an international language of the cinema. The ordinary cine-fiction film already achieves this to a certain extent, but in most cases it is a false rendering of fact. A record must be made and kept and shown of all that happens around

¹ One of the most naturally dramatic incidents in the history of the screen was the news-reel item of the Karl Alexander Assassination at Marseilles, 1934.

THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

us, apart from news matter which is adequately dealt with in the news bulletin. The lens of the camera has the power of the moving human eye. It can and does go everywhere and into everything. It climbs the side of a building and goes in through the window; it travels over factories, along steel girders, across the road, in and out of trains, up a chimney stack, through a park...into the houses of the rich and poor; it stands in the street, whilst cars, trams, 'buses, carts flash by it on all sides...it follows this person down that alley and meets that one round the corner....

'The workers of the Kino-Eye made their first manifesto in 1923, published in a paper called "Lef". But before this, from 1918 to 1922, Dziga Vertov worked alone as a pioneer and experimenter of the Kino-Eye, until between 1923 and 1925, a small group was formed, numbering among them Kaufman (Vertov's brother) and Kopaline. Since that date, the output of the group has increased, until now it may be said that the Kino-Eye group of the Vufku-kino is at the head of the documentary section of the Soviet cinema. The workers of the group rejoice in the name of *kinoki*, and of their work may be mentioned *The Struggle under Czarism*, *The Truth of Lenin*, *Kino Calendar*, *Stride Soviet*, *One Sixth Part of the World*, *The Eleventh Year*, *Spring*, *Give Us Air*, etc.

'The Kino-Eye makes use of all the particular resources of the cinema: of slow-motion, rapid-motion, reversed movement, composite and still photography, one turn—one picture, divided screen, microscopic lens, etc. It uses all the forms of montage in assembling

THE NEWS-REEL TRADITION

and presenting its facts in a coherent order out of the chaos of modern life, and it seeks to establish a level of distinction among the thousands of phenomena that present themselves on all sides to the mind of the cine-director. All this was set down at length in a manifesto by Vertov in 1919.

‘The whole of the visual theories of Vertov were summed up in *The Man with the Movie Camera*, which, although a fascinating exposition of the resources of the cinema and a marvellous example of technical accomplishment, was totally devoid of dramatic value. Throughout the film the spectator was constantly being reminded of the camera, for it was continually being brought before the eye on the screen. The film was punctuated by the interruption of a close up of the lens of the camera, the camera itself, and the eye of the cameraman. We travel along watching a cameraman photographing a lady in a carriage. We see on the screen what the camera of the cameraman is taking. We see the cameraman as the lady in the carriage sees him. We are alternately the camera and we see what the camera sees; then we are seeing the camera seeing what we saw before. At that point, we cease seeing the camera and see what we have just seen being developed and mounted in the studio laboratory. “Ah,” we say to ourselves, “that is the Kino-Eye”....

‘*The Eleventh Year* was a record of the construction of the Ukraine during the ten years of Soviet regime. Its theme was Man’s attempted control over Nature; of civilisation over the primitive. Where before there had been waste ground, now there are towns. Water

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that was useless now supplies electricity for hundreds of homes. Thus the film went on with mines and pits and chimneys and smoke and workers....

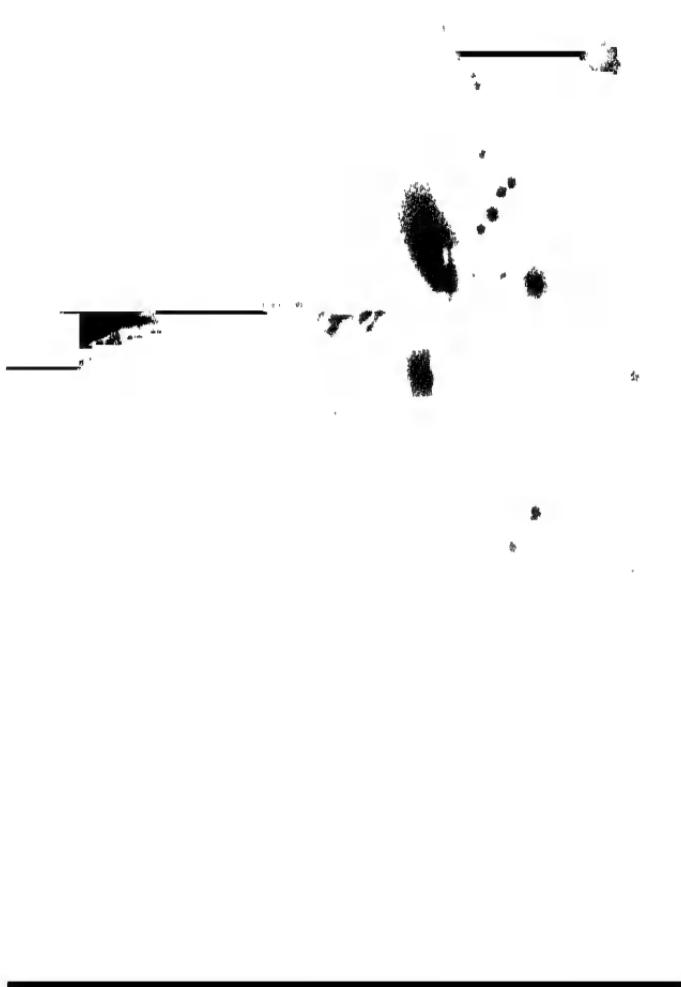
‘With the coming of the sound film, the Kino-Eye theories expand to embrace the Kino-Radio. The camera becomes the ear as well as the eye. The *kinoki* become the *radioki*. They seek now to express their material in terms of Kino-Eye-sound, in the form of radio-vision.’¹

Something of what Vertov is after in sound was demonstrated in *Enthusiasm* which, to quote from the notes in the Film Society programme (London, 15 November, 1931), ‘aroused considerable and heated discussion in Russia both on aesthetic and methodological grounds. It arises from the situation in the Don industrial area, where production was for a while lagging behind the schedules of the Five Year Plan. Vertov was to compose a film to stimulate and speed up production, and his work takes the form of a battle on the industrial front after a portrayal of the emergence of the communal mentality in which such a struggle is vital. In official circles the complaint is made that the film has all the faults of capitalist production in minimising difficulties and presenting the way to perfection in too easy a light, that it is rather a hymn in praise of ideal conditions than an examination of the problems of a difficult situation’.

Vertov, on his side, claimed that *Enthusiasm* represented the optic-tonal capture of the visible and audible world and finally vindicated his theory of the

¹ Excerpts from *The Film Till Now* (Cape), 1930, pp. 168-170.

ENTHUSIASM (Vertov)



THREE SONGS OF LENIN (Vertov)



THE NEWS-REEL TRADITION

supremacy of the actual, 'non-produced' event over the sterile artificiality of the studio. From our own reading of documentary, we can and must go a long way with Vertov in the actual collection of his material, and to a certain extent with his methods of editing, but we must diverge from his views when it comes to the question of subject interpretation and approach. He has, I am afraid, many of the faults which characterise the approach of the Continental Realists and has not succeeded, in any of the films which I have seen, in getting beneath the surface of his material. He is, I admit, master of his technique but he is not, I submit, fulfilling the fundamental requirements of documentary by interpreting the problems set by his themes. He is prophetic, he is illustrative, he is occasionally dramatic; but he is neither philosophic nor instructive. His *Three Songs of Lenin*, edited from 150 films and perhaps the first Soviet hymn, confirms this opinion. It is obscure, romantic and bombastic, lacking construction and making no creative use of the sound band.

Before leaving the Russians, there should be reference made to Esther Schub, who has edited a considerable footage of news-reel material. None of her work has been presented in England but she is said to have been most successful in the films *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* and *The Russia of Nikholai II*.

Outside Russia, there have been occasional attempts at the purposeful shaping of news-reel material, among which we may note, but need not discuss, Alexandre's *Polish Corridor (Ombres sur l'Europe)* and the curious compilation of actual events contained in

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Williams's *Whither Germany?* The efforts of the Nazi propaganda bureau have also, one gathers, given birth to various news-reel assortments with added reconstruction scenes (Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* seems to be such a conception), while the recent Jubilee Celebrations in this country saw much ransacking of vaults for news-reel items extending over a period of twenty-five years. Most of these films lack specific purpose and are technically assembled without much skill.

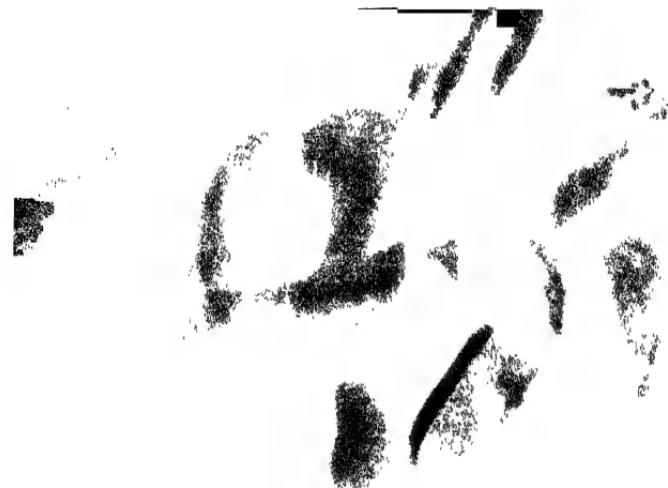
Of greater interest, but only recently available for inspection in England, would appear to be the *March of Time* series sponsored by the American periodical *Time*. At last, here would seem to be recognition of the possibilities of screen journalism. At last, here would appear to be a definite attempt to put decent reporting on the screen. *Time* has, I understand, despatched experienced staff cameramen to various parts of the world with instructions to use patience and tact and cinematic skill to obtain a *reportage* of the real origins lying behind contemporary events. A typical issue of the cinemagazine, which has a running time of twenty-five minutes and is issued monthly, contains four items: Re-armament in Europe, the political exploits of Huey Long, the Mexican Government's oppression of the Catholic Church, and America's race to span the Pacific by airplane as a means of retaining commercial supremacy in the Orient.¹ A commentary, in key with the ironic policy of its sponsors, accompanies the items and plentiful use is apparently made of animated

¹ As reported in *Variety*, 24 April, 1935.

BIRTH OF THE HOURS (Greenville)



WITHOUT PARALLEL (Kaufman)



THE NEWS-REEL TRADITION

diagrams. Without being in a position to judge methods of production, none the less it is obvious that it is along such lines as these of the *March of Time* that cinema will develop its strictly journalistic and reporting side which, whatever its relations to documentary, at any rate has its roots in the same naturally observed and recorded material shaped to special purpose.

(iv) THE PROPAGANDIST TRADITION

We have already remarked the peculiar suitabilities of the film as an instrument of propaganda. It is therefore not surprising to find that, running concurrently with the evolution of documentary, there has been an increasing tendency to realise and make use of the persuasive capacities of the medium. And it is true to observe that, whereas cinema serving the ends of profit has remained close to the theatrical tradition, cinema pursuing the ends of propaganda and persuasion has been largely responsible for the documentary method. Certainly cinema as a specific instrument of political propaganda gave rise to the characteristics of the Soviet school.

(a) Soviet

Origins and styles, experiments with technique, have been described elsewhere.¹ It is only essential here to lay emphasis on the purposes behind production and the results therefrom.

¹ See chapter on Soviet Cinema in *The Film Till Now* (Cape), and articles by various authors in *Cinema Quarterly*.

THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

In its first phase, Soviet cinema possessed an underlying ideology quite different from that of European and American production, its whole aim being propaganda in the strongest sense for the newly established Union. By the widespread exhibition of dramatic films reconstructing the events and conditions that motivated the Workers' Revolution, the State hoped to persuade and instruct its people in the new social beliefs. Cinema was recognised as an instrument of unparalleled persuasive properties and, so long as the essential purpose was expressed clearly and vividly, the artist was permitted considerable freedom of technique. Shortage of raw materials and scarcity of apparatus undoubtedly promoted experiment, but the real force, the vital power of the earlier and best Soviet films, was wholly inspired by a political urge.

Among the first films were several that adopted styles and ideas from the theatre and were similar to, but more crude than, the American and European story-film. But the vitality of their blood-and-thunder subjects, together with their contemporary significance and their requirements of actual surroundings, suggested a departure from theatrical precedent and an experimentation with the celluloid itself. Both Kuleshov and Vertov are credited with these first attempts to approach film creation from an analysis of editing; the former with scientific experiments relating to the association of images, the latter with shaping news-reel material to greater purpose than the mere description of events. Let it suffice that out of these theories grew the big revolutionary films of Eisenstein and Pudovkin

THE PROPAGANDIST TRADITION

—*Potemkin*, *October*, *Mother*, *The End of St Petersburg*— which made use of the living scene, either as an integral part of the story or as a background from which common types could be drawn. Pudovkin, of course, chose the method of taking individuals (for which he sometimes used actors) to express the spirit of the mass, while Eisenstein, in his first three films, took the mass as a whole to interpret impersonally his given themes. Both made use of and developed further the scientific method of editing material evolved from the earlier experiments of Kuleshov.

It was in connection with *October*, the film which dealt with the political issues and personalities of the events which culminated in the Workers' Revolution of 1917, that we hear first of the ideological conception; where Eisenstein made use of his brilliant knowledge of film techniques to shape an entirely new form of cinema. Referring to his scenario, he is said to have written: 'It films the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution. The scenario groups round the period from the February to the October Revolution. It is made from historic material.'¹

For this material Eisenstein had obviously to rely on the reconstruction of scenes and incidents which had taken place nearly ten years earlier, but which could be re-staged with a fair amount of accuracy and little artificial assistance. Political in purpose, both in director's aim and that of the forces controlling production, *October* undertook the selection and presentation of actual events and persons, not for accurate historical

¹ *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. II, no. 4.

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description but for the expression of a definite viewpoint which conformed with a definite political regard for the affairs of 1917. Hence you will remember the omission of Trotsky. Not only the simple forms of dramatic construction but the subtler observations of irony and caricature were employed by the director to persuade the spectator towards the desired political acceptance of the facts. Hence the brilliant ironic characterisation of Kerensky. This, you may say, is merely the result of propagandist aim. It is. But it is also something more. It is creating a form of documentary approach which gives new meanings to familiar things; not representing persons and things as they are, but relating them in such a manner to their surroundings that they temporarily assume new significance. Actual events and actual phenomena are transformed by the powers of the film into material which can be shaped to take on different significances according to the director's aim; in this case to serve a political end by means of a dialectical treatment.

From a historical point of view, the second phase of the Soviet cinema demanded themes which would project the urgent necessity for social and economic reconstruction along the lines of the first Five Year Plan, to inspire in peasant and worker minds a faith for which no sacrifice and no enthusiasm could be too great. At all cost the Plan must be put through, a subject rich in film themes but more difficult to dramatise than the earlier revolutionary subjects. In most cases they dealt with the passing of the old and the coming of the new, the triumph of the fresh order over past



BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN (Eisenstein)



OCTOBER (Eisenstein)

THE PROPAGANDIST TRADITION

beliefs, the winning over of the superstitious peasant; in other words, the problems of a country going to school.

Earth, *The General Line* and *Turksib* are the films that claim attention; but more by their avoidance of issues than by their success. Dovjenko, artist though he may be, shirked the real theme of *Earth* by an escape into a romantic idyll of nature, beautiful and sensitive artistically, but materialistically of small significance. Eisenstein, discovering that he had little real interest in collectivisation, sidetracked into a display of technical fireworks that greatly enriched his foreign reputation, filling in the gaps with comedy relief borrowed from American slapstick. Turin's *Turksib* alone defined the line of Soviet approach to pure documentary, for it discarded the story form altogether and in grand style dramatised the economic need for and the building of the Turkestan-Siberian railway. It posed a problem arising out of the economic-geographic character of the regions concerned, dramatised in an impressionist style the gathering of the material for the building of the railroad, and concluded with a superbly constructed passage carrying a plea that the railway must be finished within a certain period of time. Both in technical style and approach, *Turksib* marked the beginning of a new documentary method and has probably had more influence on later developments than any other picture, not excluding Ruttman's *Berlin*. It was greeted with sincere enthusiasm, not only in the Union, but by many hundreds of British school-children, to whom this railway became as important

THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

for the moment as anything in their own country. But it is only fair to put on record that *Turksib* owed not a little of its success to Grierson's editing of the English version.

Of the more recent phases of the Soviet cinema only a few examples have come to hand outside their country of origin, but there is certainly a very wide tendency to develop the documentary and instructional film. The work of directors like Vladimir Schneiderov, Blioch, Posselsky, Yerofeyev and Koltosov, and the fact that film expeditions have penetrated far into the Arctic, into Turkey, Arabia and Persia, indicate that the most interesting developments are taking place with the documentary approach to actual experience. Within the film centres, at Moscow, Leningrad, Vostock and Odessa, problems of sound and problems of expressing a new ideology dealing with the building of a new country and the teaching of a new generation absorb current production. *Men and Jobs*, *Counterplan* and *Salt of Svanetia* are the more interesting films. But, to judge from the Kino Conference which preceded the Moscow Film Festival of 1935, there would appear to be a tendency for a less impersonal approach and a greater emphasis on the position of the human being, tendencies with which we shall deal later.

We can, however, estimate for our documentary purpose that the Soviet approach to the living theme and living scene, inspired by the ideology of a new political and social system, gave rise to new forms of technical construction and to new interpretations of



TURKSIB (Turin)

INDUSTRIAL BRITAIN (Flaherty & Grierson)



THE PROPAGANDIST TRADITION

natural material which were to lay a new basis for documentary production. It was, in fact, a very definite advance on the technical methods of the romantic school and of considerable more importance to modern needs than the ancient struggle of Man against Nature, or the impressionist patterns of the Continental Realists. Later, we shall see how this important school of propaganda production based its approach on the dialectic method, threw over the old conception of ideas being more valuable than material facts and built the beginnings of a new tradition in documentary—the dialectic form.

(b) British

Cinema as an expression of national publicities created documentary in Britain. In the form of a Government Department, the Empire Marketing Board was initiated in 1928 to 'promote all the major researches across the world which affect the production or preservation or transport of the British Empire's food supplies'.¹

There were forty-five departments in all, of which the Film Unit was the last, for cinema naturally enjoyed less consideration than regional sales-drives, accounts of wastage in imported fruit, retail surveys at home and abroad, or researches entymological and mycological. Even under the banner of Publicity, cinema came junior to poster advertising and leaflet distribution.

¹ 'The E.M.B. Film Unit', John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4.

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Out of these humble beginnings, with little money for wages or apparatus, there grew a Film Unit which laid in Britain the seeds of documentary; which was to become, and I say this in full awareness of its implications, this country's most important contribution to cinema as a whole.

Criticised on many sides, especially by the Trade, the Unit has gradually accumulated prestige and increased the quality of its work since its inception. Such progress was largely due to two causes: the personal vitality and ability of John Grierson, at first director and later producer for the Unit, and the wisdom of the E.M.B. officials, notably Sir Stephen Tallents, in allowing the production of its films to create a gradual effect on the public mind rather than a sudden, but quickly forgotten, overnight impression. Not only did this far-sighted policy achieve a more valuable contribution to public feeling, but it permitted the personnel of the Unit a certain freedom to experiment with technical matters impossible under conditions obtaining in the profit-making studios. The result produced the only *group* of film minds outside the Soviet Union which has a real understanding of the purpose and making of documentary—that is to say which can 'bring to life' in terms of cinema some of the essential factors and problems of modern experience.

I do not claim that the E.M.B. Film Unit projected all the subjects of documentary or even a hundredth part of them. That was neither possible nor desirable within its powers of production. But it did, and none but the most prejudiced can deny this, bring certain

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aspects of modern Britain to life on the screen with a sincerity and skill unapproached by any commercially operating company, at the same time bringing into existence a co-operative method of working and a spirit of loyalty which is notably absent in most other centres of film manufacture.

From a sociological point of view, the E.M.B. also represented the first attempt to portray the working-class of England as a human, vital factor in present-day existence, to throw on the screen the rough labour of the industrial worker, the skill of the trained craftsman and the toil of the agricultural labourer.

To return to actual films, Walter Creighton (with a reputation as a producer of pageants and tattoos¹) and Grierson, the original joint officers of the Unit, made their first beginnings by an analysis of what had been done in the way of national projection in other countries and showing the findings to the powers-that-were. We may note that among the exhibits were *Berlin*, *The Covered Wagon*, *The Iron Horse* and sundry Soviet pictures. Ultimately the idea was sold and money arrived for production. Grierson made *Drifters*, Creighton made *One Family*; this was 1929.

In that *Drifters* is Grierson's only personally directed film, it has come to be regarded as being more important than it actually is, or was, for that matter, intended to be. Made on a shoestring (Creighton had

¹ In this connection we may also note that Eisenstein was a producer of pageants, such as the Red Square spectacle, and such sequences as the procession along the Mole in *Potemkin* reveal influence of this training.

THE EVOLUTION OF DOCUMENTARY

most of the money for production), with little previous practical experience, it humbly brought to the screen the labour of the North Sea herring catch from such an approach that the ordinary person was made to realise, probably for the first time, that a herring on his plate was no mere accepted thing but the result of other men's physical toil and possibly courage. It 'brought alive' (an E. M. B. phrase) not just the routine of the catch but the whole drama of emotional values that underlay the task, interpreting in its stride the unconscious beauty of physical labour in the face of work done for a livelihood. Moreover, there was brought to the conception all the poetic qualities of ships, sea and weather. In other words, Grierson took a simple theme (there for the taking), took actually existing material (there for the shooting), and built a dramatised film by interpreting the relationships of his theme and material in the sphere of daily existence.

Leaving style and technique apart, *Drifters* laid the foundation for documentary in this country. Maybe it lacked a full expression of social purpose. Powers of production limited that. But it was inspired by a greater aim than mere description or superficial observation. It was inspired by a sincere understanding of the labour of man and the poetry of the sea. Beyond that, it served, and served well, a purpose beyond itself.

After an experimental 'illumination' school film, *Conquest*, compiled chiefly from library material, Grierson turned producer and by so doing enabled production to grow as a whole under his supervision. One by one fresh minds, all young and willing to work



LANCASHIRE AT WORK AND PLAY (Taylor)

WEATHER FORECAST (Spice)



THE PROPAGANDIST TRADITION

for the humble wages that documentary could pay, were enlisted to the Unit. 'The problem', writes Grierson, 'was not so much to repeat that relative success (*Drifters*) but to guarantee that, with time, we should turn out good documentaries as a matter of certainty. It was a case of learning the job not on the basis of one director, one location and one film at a time, but on the basis of half-a-dozen directors with complementary talents and a hundred and one subjects all along the line.'¹

Thus the product of the group is not to be measured fairly by the work of one individual director but rather by their collective effort; certain directors revealing a flair for handling mechanical industrial subjects, others for a more lyrical approach. Flaherty's *Industrial Britain* brought an appreciation of the beauty of camera movements but, for the most part, development came from within the group itself and not from outside assimilation.

Of their films we may include here only the outstanding, which are to be regarded in the light of experiment rather than as mature work: *The Voice of the World*, *Shadow on the Mountain*, and *Aero-Engine* from Elton; *O'er Hill and Dale*, *Country Comes to Town*, *Cargo from Jamaica* and *Windmill in Barbados* from Wright; *New Generation* from Legg; and *Lancashire at Work* from Taylor. Such was the production list, along with many lesser efforts, when the Government, overwhelmed by economic responsibilities, saw fit to abolish the Empire Marketing Board as a whole, in-

¹ *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 4.

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cluding the Film Unit and its by-then comprehensive film library of original pictures and re-editings of material gathered from many sources.

Happily for documentary, however, the department of the Post Office was inspired to take over the running of the Unit in order to play a part in the public relations of that department, together with the library of films which '...it was felt...with its pictures of life in Great Britain and in so many overseas parts of the Empire, afforded the best possible setting for a special series of films depicting those postal, airmail, telegraphic and telephonic resources by which communications are maintained within the United Kingdom and between the United Kingdom and the rest of the Empire'.¹

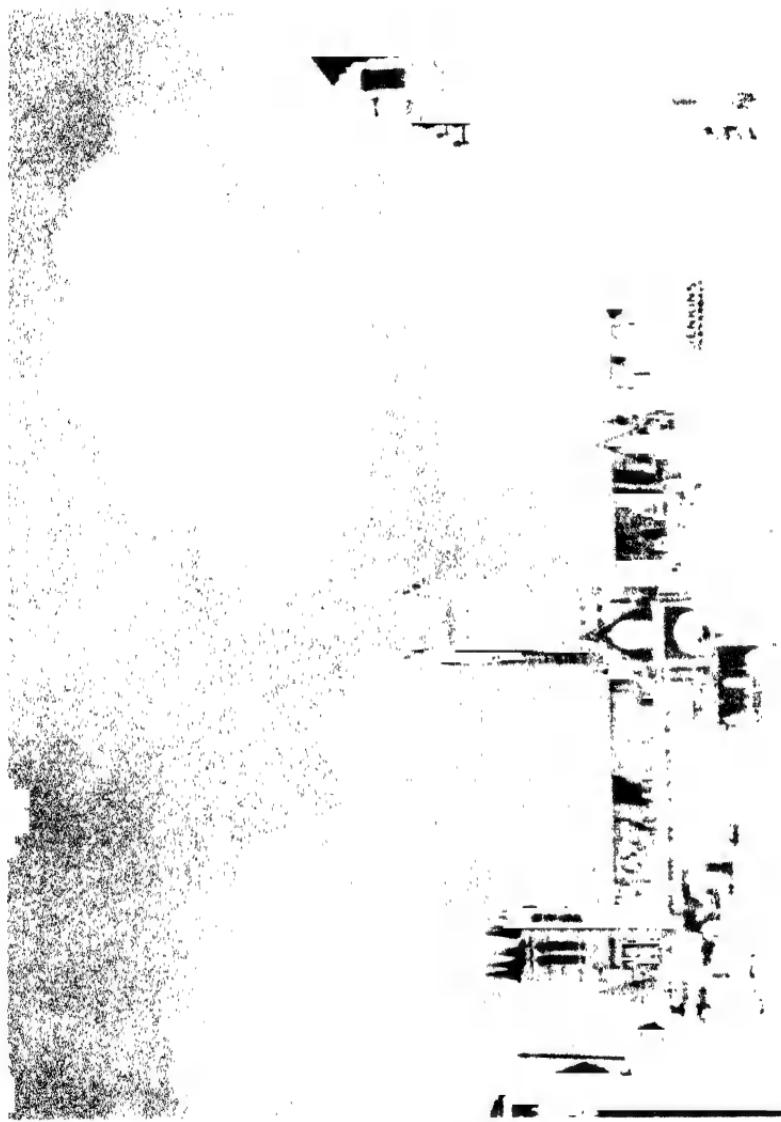
Thus, within the special limits of propaganda for communications and research, the new G.P.O. Film Unit is beginning to explore the world of documentary sound in the same way that the E.M.B. Unit explored the world of visuals, a task in which Cavalcanti is greatly aiding. Discarding the belief that sound is a technical secret beheld only by experts, they are experimenting as they experimented with the camera the whole untouched field of orchestrated and imagistic sound, with the interesting results that are seen in the first group of the new films: *Weather Forecast*, *Under the City*, *Six-Thirty Collection*, *Cable-Ship* and *Droitwich*.

We may, or may not, agree with all the work that this Unit, first as the E.M.B. and now as the G.P.O., has produced. Some of it is stylised, some of it is preten-

¹ Preface to the G.P.O. Film Library Catalogue, 1933.



UNDER THE CITY (Elton & Shaw)



FOR ALL ETERNITY (Marion Grierson)

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tious, but at the least it does represent an immensely valuable contribution to cinema and has explored the method of documentary more fully than any other producing group in Britain or America. Notwithstanding its limitations of approach and subject, it has made production possible in a manner impossible in the ordinary commercial field. For that alone, anyone who cares at all about the education and social progress of this country should be grateful. But perhaps its greatest achievement has been to act as a training school for documentary and a sorting house for theory and practice such as does not exist anywhere else in the world except in Russia. Without its presence, I am quite certain that documentary would not exist on the high scale that it does in Britain to-day. I emphasise this aspect of the Unit especially in view of the many attacks which have been made against it by those who are influenced by Trade prejudice and those who resent the success achieved by its originators. We must remember, for the moment, that every significant director of British documentary has, at one time or another, either been a member of, or has been closely associated with, the Unit. Such recent and important pictures as *The Song of Ceylon*, *For All Eternity*, *Coal Face*, *Citizens of the Future*, Shaw's films for the Orient line and Elton's for the Gas Association, have all had their origins of style and thought in Grierson's Unit. In five years, it has brought considerable repute to this country as a film-producing centre, repute of a kind that lives longer and goes further than a flag-wagging story-film.

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(c) German and Italian

Mention has already been made of the vital quality infused into the Soviet films by propaganda for political and social ends. From a technical aspect, it is regrettable that there has been no opportunity in Britain for viewing the political films of the German Nazis and the Italian Fascists. Dr Goebbels, we read, having had the entire German Film Trade (or what remains of it) on the carpet, held up the *Potemkin* of his enemies as a paragon of what propaganda films should be. As a result, there would appear to be at any rate two films of technical interest to documentary. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*, a sort of document-biography of Hitler, apparently contains sequences of technical virtuosity, leading us to suppose that the interpretation of a political ideology has greatly changed the anaemic outlook of the director of *The Blue Light*. I am told, also, that *The Right of Man*, another documentary, is conceived and executed with a brilliance of technique.

From Italy we have seen only portions of the not very successful *Acciaio*, by Ruttman, and portions of a film glorifying the achievements of Mussolini in the reclamation work of the Pontine Marshes, neither of which suggested that there was any indication of an understanding of the documentary method in Italy.

These, then, are the main sources and traditions from which documentary as we know it to-day has sprung. With the general use of the natural exterior

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and the real human being as a background, with the romantic idealism of Flaherty offset by the aesthetic realism of the Continental Realists, with propaganda as a basis for the Soviets and the Grierson Unit, with one or two individuals here and there, like Ivens and Storck, we have arrived at a point where we may discuss theories and first principles, and try and relate documentary to the common needs of society.

Three

**SOME PRINCIPLES OF
DOCUMENTARY**

Three

SOME PRINCIPLES OF DOCUMENTARY

Every tendency in cinema reflects the social and political characteristics of its period, which in turn may, or may not, according to your reasoning, be a reflection of the obtaining economic conditions. The documentary method, as a distinct kind of film, as an interpretation of social feeling and philosophic thought quite different in purpose and form from the entertainment motives of the story-film, has materialised largely as the result of sociological, political and educational requirements.

In the foregoing estimate of documentary traditions, we have tried to show that documentary is a genuine independent kind of cinema, as distinct from the story-film or photoplay as is the biography from the novel. Further, we have tried to define the main characteristics that exist between the plain descriptive pictures of everyday life (travel pictures, nature films, educational and news-reels) that fall short of documentary requirements and the creative dramatisation of actuality and the expression of social analysis that are the first demand of the documentary method.

At any rate, it is clear, I think, that in purposeful documentary we enter a range of perception wider

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than has so far been attempted in descriptive films, for propaganda needs persuasive statements and implications that furrow deeply into the surface of modern experience. In the use of documentary for dialectical purpose, for example, we can conceive whole periods of time, symbolised by their existing heritages to-day, being arranged in dramatic shape to express a variety of outlooks. We can imagine how the fundamental sentiments of the human mind can be analysed and dissected to suit a multitude of purposes. The immense range of discursive power made possible by film technique suggests the documentary method as an admirable instrument for clarifying and coordinating all aspects of modern thought, in the hope of achieving a fuller analysis that may in turn lead to more definite conclusions. But how does this interpretation of the documentary method evolve from the traditions which we have just described? Before we can arrive at even first definitions, the existing tendencies require further analysis to discover if they are progressing on the most suitable lines.

Flaherty serves us well to demonstrate the elementary demands of documentary. He asks an observation of natural material on its actual location, from which the theme may arise. Further, he asks an interpretation of that material, to bring it alive as a reality on the screen, which can be attained only by a complete understanding 'from the inside' of such material and its relationships. For his own method, he prefers the inclusion of a slight narrative, not fictional incident or interpolated 'cameos', but the daily routine of his

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native people. For his themes and locations he goes to those parts of the world where, supposedly, Man has still to fight Nature for his existence, although in most cases Flaherty reconstructs native life of a past or dying generation. The heroes of both *Nanook* and *Man of Aran*, for example, were waxwork figures acting the lives of their grandfathers. And it is precisely this choice which leads us to explore the validity of his approach in relation to documentary's social purpose.

In the modern world in which most of us live, it is doubtful if we are primarily interested in Man's primitive relationship with Nature. Pushing back the sea to build a quay wall, or damming a river to harness its energy, admittedly present great achievements of scientific and engineering skill. But does not their importance, from a social aspect, lie less in the actual feat itself than in its resultant effect upon the geography of the landscape and ultimately the benefit to the economic life of the people concerned? The idyllic documentalist, it is true, is chiefly interested in Man's conquering of natural objects to bend them to his ends. Admittedly, the sea was an obstacle to communication until Man built ships to cross it. The air was useless to Man's economic life, except as wind-power, until he learnt to fly through it. The minerals of the earth were valueless until Man discovered how to mine. And, in the same way, production to-day is generally acknowledged to be more than sufficient to meet the needs of the community. But the success of science and machine-controlled industry has resulted in an unequal distribution of the ameni-

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ties of existence under the relationships of the present economic system. Side by side with leisure and well-being there is also unemployment, poverty and wide social unrest. Our essential problem to-day is to equate the needs of the individual with production, to discuss the most satisfactory economic system and to present the social relationships of mankind in their most logical and modern ordering. Despite their braveries, Man's fight against the fury of the Sea, Man's creation of unnatural pain to prove his manhood, Man's battle against snow and ice and animals are of secondary interest in a world where so many urgent and larger problems demand our attention.

Granted that we may not expect the sentimentalist director to grapple with the materialist problems of our age, but at least we may expect from him an acknowledgment of their existence. Surely we have the right to believe that the documentary method, the most virile of all kinds of film, should not ignore the vital social issues of this year of grace, should not avoid the economic relationships which govern the present productive system and, consequently, determine the cultural, social and aesthetic attitudes of society?

Let Flaherty's fine feeling for photography stand, accept his unique sensibility to natural movements and his grand poetic vision of Man against the Sky, confess (in passing) that *Man of Aran* avoided all the important issues raised by sound, but let us realise, in the face of all the gilt of Venice, that the Flaherty method is an evasion of the issues that matter most in the modern world, is devoid of any attempt at serious



MAN OF ARAN (Flaherty)



THE FACE OF BRITAIN (Rotha)

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social analysis. Give to Flaherty his credits; and they are many. Acknowledge our deep obligation to his pioneer spirit, his fierce battles to break down commercial stupidity and the bravery of his struggle against the despicable methods of exploitation from which he has suffered. But realise, at the same time, and within the sphere of documentary, that his understanding of actuality is a sentimental reaction towards the past, an escape into a world that has little contemporary significance, a placing of sentimentalism above the more urgent claims of materialism.

No slums or factories, no employment exchanges or income-tax bureaus, no weekly rents or tithes exist in this fairy world of make-believe created by the romantic tradition of documentary. Only Man against Nature; cruel, bitter, savage and heroic but unrelated to modern society. Industry and commerce are as remote as their carven symbols which flank the Albert Memorial, or as the muscular stalwarts that lean nonchalantly on slender sledge-hammers and the bronzed workers who flourish torches of servility under the nose of good Victoria. True, Flaherty observed in his own way the craftsmanship of the potter and the glassblower when in the Midlands for *Industrial Britain*, but is it not significant that those very trades are fading before the advance of mass-production and machinery? And did not the filming of coal and steel and other heavy industry in that film fall to other hands?

In every location which he has chosen there have existed social problems that demanded expression.

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Exploitation of native labour, the practices of the white man against the native, the landlords of Aran, these have been the vital stories, but from them Flaherty has turned away. Probably he realised that their exposure would have clashed with the interests controlling the production and distribution of his films. It was not, we may grant, in his power to expose. Instead he was content to present the 'braveries of all time'. Certainly he retreated into an acceptance of the irrelevance which is the fate of all escapists. Idyllic documentary is documentary without significant purpose. It takes romanticism as its banner. It ignores social analysis. It takes ideas instead of facts. It marks a reactionary return to the worship of the heroic, to an admiration of the barbaric, to a setting up of 'The Leader'.

The symphonic approach of the Continental Realists, on the other hand, goes at first appearance to realism. But for the most part the French and German directors see the documentary film as a work of art in itself, as a symphony of tempos and movements, rather than that the art should be an offshoot of the larger issue of a job well done to meet a special purpose.

Thus the symphonic conception of *Berlin* provides a pleasant enough pyrotechnical exercise, skimming over the many tantalising rhythms of modern life in street and factory and countryside, without thought of the 'how' and 'wherefore' underlying the social scene. Yet, despite their exciting tempos, despite their bustle and thronging of modern city life, these big and little symphonies of big and little cities create nothing more

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valuable to civilisation than a shower of rain. All the outward signs of a busy metropolis are there. People work and eat: a suicide and a wedding: but not one single implication underlies it all.

Again there is evasion, a deliberate self-satisfaction in the surface rhythms of a printing-press or the processions of a milk-bottling machine, but nothing of inflated circulations or wages paid, nothing to suggest that the social and economic relations contained in the subject are the real material of documentary. The manufacture of steel is visually exciting. Ruttman, Nicolas and Basse have shown us that. But they did not think to show us that steel builds bridges, builds ships to cross the seas, radio masts to throw a girdle of communication round the earth, pylons to carry a new power up the length and breadth of the land, knives to eat with and needles to sew with. They did not tell us that steel is a State ceremony, that its foundrymen and smiths are in a sense national figures: nor that its labour might be underpaid, its risks horrifying and its markets cut across by private speculation.

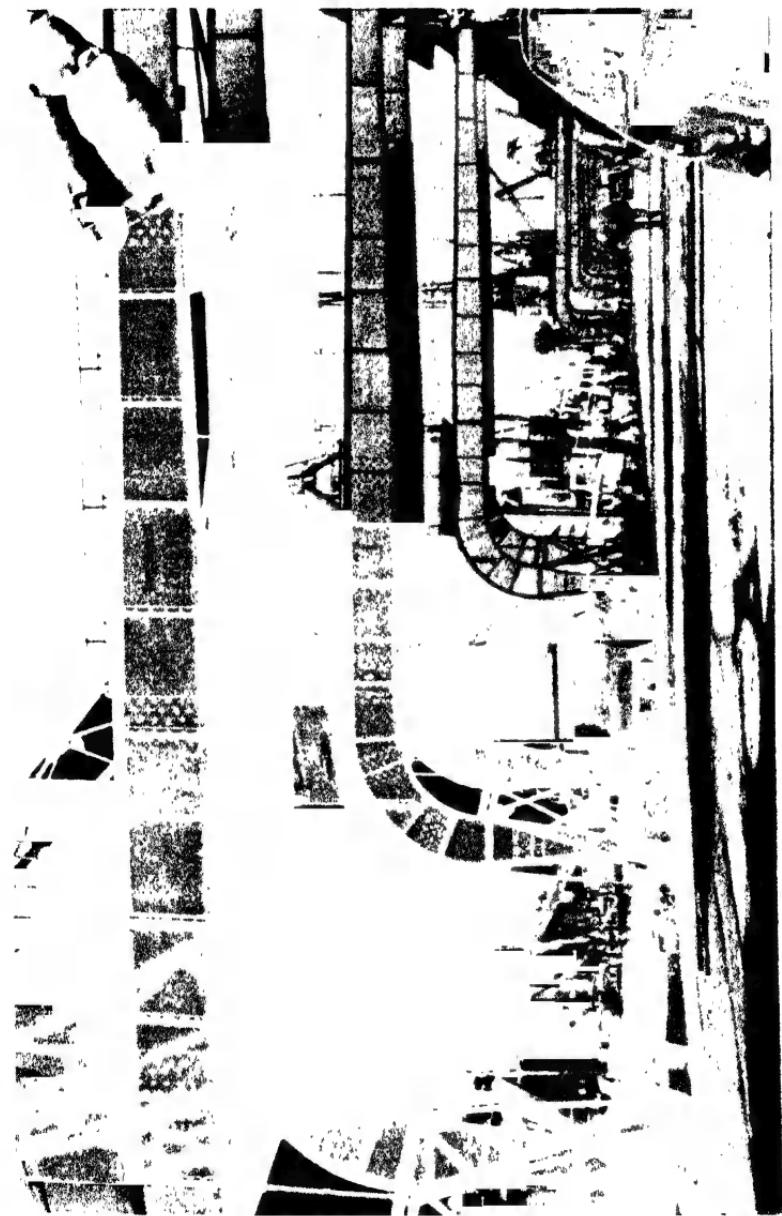
Based on the same method of approach, but lacking the technical trickery that made *Berlin* of interest, Basse's film *Deutschland von Gestern und Heute* admirably epitomises the realist tradition of the Continental school. Cross-sectioning in painful detail almost every aspect of German life, it is typical of the method in that it observes the pictorial surface of the scene but refuses to penetrate beneath the skin. It is said for Basse that he intended to show how the style of living in former

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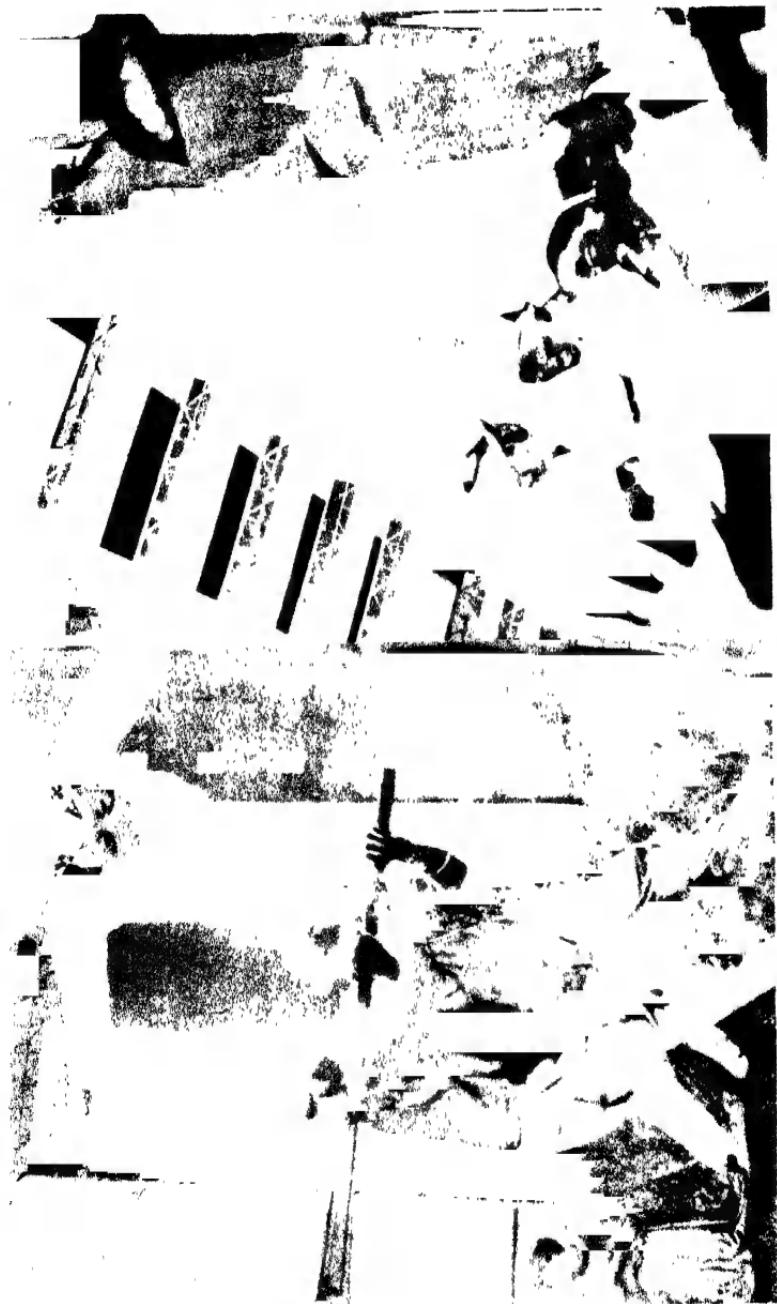
times is still affecting modern life, that from the prehistoric forms of a primitive economic system the film leads historically over the Gothic style to Renaissance, from baroque to rococo, from the *Biedermeierzeit* to the complacency of present middle-class society, the provincial character of which makes possible the crescendo of a modern city's activity.¹ But I do not find Basse doing anything of the sort.

Instead, we have all the ingredients of the photographer's album, townspeople and countryfolk, pastimes and processions, customs and conventions, industry and agriculture, mediaeval city and modern metropolis. They are all neatly shuffled and labelled, arranged in order like a good picture-book, with the camera roving here and there and roundabout. But as with Ruttman, so with Basse. Nothing is related socially. Nothing is said creatively. Nothing lives. The long-winded procession of images, some of them not too well photographed, meanders along without drive or purpose. Running to story-feature length, this film more than any other exposes the weakness of a purposeless theme. It is as if Basse just did not care how and why his images came to be. Unrelated geographically, they are put together in some form of contrast from which a mild implication might be drawn, but there is no essential aim behind it all. A few fleeting comments on the childishness of official parades, passing observations on the idiotic behaviourism of the *petite bourgeoisie*, but that is all. Had it been political, had it been sociological, had it been a

¹ See Arnheim, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. II, no. 3.



GERMANY YESTERDAY AND TO-DAY (Basse)



RFRIJN (Ruttmann)

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compromise of respective description, it might have had point.

The visual arabesques of plunging pistons, the endless streams of trams and trains, the ballet movements of spinning bobbins, the belching issue of a steel furnace, the plough team and the harvest and the tractor, these as beautiful, exciting, poetic things in themselves are the main delights of the pseudo-realist approach. More difficult, perhaps, than the noble savage hero, who in himself is a curious being, but even more escapist for its delight in surface values; more subtle because of its treating with familiar scenes but more dangerous because of its artistic avoidance of vital issues. Its virtue lies in the surface beauties of techniques and tempos; its value is craftsmanship with no end in view except its own virtuosity. It may have poetry, lyricism, beauty of movement, sensibility, but these are minor virtues. The point is well made in Grierson's criticism of Elton's *Voice of the World*, a documentary of radio-gramophone production.

'Concentration on movement and rhythmic good looks obscures *importance* of the instrument. The building and *delivery* of the instrument, the key to the situation, not dramatised sufficiently. The result powerful but less than heroic. Elton possibly unappreciative of radio's social significance and therefore lacking in proper (aesthetic) affection for subject. This point important, as affecting almost all the tyros of documentary. Too damned arty and post-War to get their noses into public issues. Miss

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accordingly the larger dramatic themes possible to the medium.¹

The Continental Realists and their many imitators, then, are occupied principally by their interpretation of surface rhythms. They fail to appreciate the significance of their images or tempos. They give us a concerto of rotating wheels as a visual rhythm but do not realise that these stand as images of an epoch, symbols of an era of economic industrialism; and that only by relating these images to the human society which has given them existence can they become of real interest on the contemporary screen.

Analysis of all the tendencies of documentary, in fact, gives rise to the criticism that one of the real issues of modern society is being almost wholly avoided. In this age of social realism, surely one of the first aims of documentary should be to examine the problem of Man's place in society? Surely it is pointless, if not impossible, to bring alive the realities of the modern world unless we do so in such a manner as to base our themes on the relationship of Man to the world in which he lives? Machinery, agriculture, craftsmanship, culture and the rest cannot be divorced from their human fulfilments. Yet this is the very mistake into which some of our documentalists seem to have fallen. Apparently they fail to realise that the basis of the documentary method is a materialistic basis; that it is the material circumstances of civilisation which create and condition the present cultural, sociological, political, religious and aesthetic ideas of society.

¹ *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 2.

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On almost every side, moreover, documentary has deliberately been allowed to avoid the existence of the human being as the main actor in civilisation. Certainly people of many types have appeared in documentary but they have rarely been treated as anything but impersonal puppets. In following a path opposite to that of the story-film, documentary has been permitted to prefer the mass to the individual or, in some cases, simply an impersonal statement of facts. Not only have the documentalists failed to relate the mass to the individual, but, despite the fact that their material and subjects are naturalistic, they have also failed to relate their themes to current social consciousness.

It is interesting, at this point, to note that this problem of setting the human being against a naturalistic environment is the main subject of discussion in the present Soviet kino. Practically the whole of the preliminary closed conference preceding the Moscow Film Festival of 1935 was given over to criticism of the Soviet cinema's inability to recognise and incorporate the individual in its films. That is why *Chapaev*, a dull film technically, was accorded such praise. That is why we have Dinamov making the plea that 'the theory of a film without a plot is a very dangerous theory', and Eisenstein stating that 'a film without emotional feeling is scarcely worth consideration'.

The fact is that since the Russians left their initial period of blood-and-thunder and strike, since the era of *Mother* and *Potemkin*, not one of them has succeeded in tackling the problems set by a new state of society,

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unless it will be Dovjenko in his new film *Air-City*. It was one thing to evolve a set of rhythms which made the Odessa Steps massacre a scene of tremendous emotion, but quite another to relate the working of a milk separator to collective farming. So, in *The General Line*, we had a fine display of fireworks and slapstick by an expert showman; in *A Simple Case*, a set of artificial people with petty passions and a return to the Civil War for blood-and-thunder action, which all the splendid improvisations of a 'Birth and Regeneration' sequence failed to justify. From his insistence on the importance that the real struggle lay at one's own backdoor, we might suspect that Pudovkin saw the fault in *Deserter*, but, as Grierson pointed out, he still evaded the issue by retreating to the street riots of Hamburg (so like the *St Petersburg* location) and observed the working of his Russian factory with all the badness of a great artist.

Nor, when all was said and done, did the enthusiasms of a hundred thousand toilers in a Dziga Vertov cacophony do much to solve the task. Nearer the mark was *Counterplan*, in which the ideas were better than their fulfilment; but most progressive of all, to my mind, was *Men and Jobs* which grappled with the problem of the untrained worker at the building of Dnieperstroï. Here, at least, was a bid to meet the issues of Russia going to school. The human being was, in a sense, related to the problems from which the theme arose. As persuasion for the shock brigadier to learn from American efficiency, it was probably effective. But observe that the philosophy was still unsound. En-

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thusiasm, no matter how inspired, can never conquer science. Together they may achieve idealist aims but no engineer's science can be learnt as this film suggested. A crane is not worked by enthusiasm, although a film may have it so. A dam is not built by faith alone. A country cannot exist on a diet of ideology. And, in this measure also, *Men and Jobs* minimised its task.

Equally in their own sphere, the E.M.B. films of Britain avoided the major issues provoked by their material. That was inevitable under their powers of production. The real economic issues underlying the North Sea herring catch, the social problems inherent in any film dealing seriously with the Industrial Midlands, lay outside the scope of a Unit organised under a Government Department and having as its aim 'the bringing alive of the Empire'. The directors concerned knew this, and wisely, I think, avoided any economic or important social analysis. Instead they contented themselves with attempting a simple statement of facts, dramatising the action material of their themes, but leaving untouched the wider human fulfilments of the job.

It is strange that these many and varied efforts to realise and solve the problem of people in documentary are marked by an increasing, and perhaps dangerous, return to theatricalism. Having been freed from the banalities of the story-film, having been developed along fresh and stimulating lines, we may now be faced with the sad if faintly ironic spectacle of documentary returning, in spirit if not in material, to the studio. With the Russians arguing for a discon-

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tinuance of typage and the resuscitation of the trained actor, with Ruttman's linking of love with steel, and the G.P.O. Unit romanticising their Savings' Banks and making a melodrama out of the designing of a stamp, it looks as if we shall yet see the all-star documentary, if indeed we have not already done so in *B.B.C: The Voice of Britain*.

But the fact remains that this, one of documentary's most important problems, must be faced. Clearly a full and real expression of the modern scene and modern experience cannot be achieved unless people are observed in accurate relation to their surroundings. To do this, there must be establishment and development of character. There must be the growth of ideas, not only in theme, but in the minds of characters. Your individuals must be of the audience. They must be familiar in type and character. They themselves must think and convey their thoughts to the audience, because only in that way will documentary succeed in its sociological or other propagandist purpose. Documentary must be the voice of the people speaking from the homes and factories and fields of the people.

And it is these very requirements which will continue to distinguish documentary from the story-film. For in the latter, a character is seldom permitted to think other than trivial personal thoughts, or to have opinions in any way connected with the larger issues of existence. Just as in documentary the facts of the theme must be important facts, so also must be the characterisation and outlook possessed by the in-

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dividuals, for they are, in turn, conditioned by those same facts. In documentary this is possible, whereas in the story-film, at any rate under present conditions of manufacture, facts and ideas as well as characterisation are suppressed in the interests of the balance sheet and technique alone is left to the director.

The foregoing severe criticism of purpose and method in documentary to-day is, of course, necessarily arbitrary. Documentary is a type of film possessing certain well-defined characteristics. Each of the films included in our estimate falls within its scope. But because they do not all carry the social analysis which, in some opinions, is documentary's most important task, does not deny their often brilliant craftsmanship or our respect for their director's outlook. Rather does this signify that, quite reasonably, interpretations of the documentary method may differ; that there are different intentions underlying different observations; that whereas Flaherty, for example, can find his theme in the heroic braveries of all time expressed through some up-to-date 'primitive' tribe, others find their material on the home front, in the back streets and factories and locations closer to those actualities among which so many of us live; that, whereas some prefer the attitude of romanticism, others of us set ourselves the task of building from a materialistic basis. It is purely a question of personal character and inclination, of how strongly you feel about satisfying private artistic fancies or communal aims. No director makes documentary simply for the wages he is paid. That we leave to the panjandrums of the story-film.

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Your documentalist creates documentary and believes in the documentary method of cinema because he considers it the most powerful means of expression available to-day.

Yet, despite my plea that the maker of documentary should be politically and socially conscious in his approach to everyday experience, he has no claim to the label of politician. His job is not upon a platform to harangue the mob but in a pulpit to persuade the mass to a wider consideration of human affairs. He is neither a fighter nor a barnstormer. Rather is he a prophet concerned with the broadest references of human associations. He is a propagandist making use of the most influential instrument of his time. He does not march with the crowd but goes just ahead, asking contemplation and discussion before action is taken on those problems with which he deals. In cinema, it is the documentary method which has proved the most suitable for these ends because it is a method of philosophic reasoning.

The immediate task of the documentalist is, I believe, to find the means whereby he can employ a mastery of his art of public persuasion to put the people and their problems, their labour and their service, before themselves. His is a job of presenting one half of the populace to the other. Of bringing a deeper and more intelligent social analysis to bear upon the whole cross-section of modern society; exploring its weaknesses, reporting its events, dramatising its experiences and suggesting a wider and more sympathetic understanding among the prevailing class



CITIZENS OF THE FUTURE (Taylor)



ZUIDERZEE (Ivens)

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of society. He does not, I think, seek to draw conclusions but rather to make a statement of the case so that conclusions may be drawn. His world is in the streets, the homes, the factories and the workshops of the people, presenting this experience and that event to make his point. And if the documentary method to-day is being put to a double-headed use, if it is being employed to express a meaning within a meaning, then that is not the fault of the documentalist but of the time in which he lives.

Throughout this book I am laying emphasis on the documentary method rather than on documentary as a particular kind of film. For this reason, that although documentary has been characterised by its creative use of the materials and apparatus of cinema, although it has made special use of actualities rather than of artificialities, it is the method which prompts this practise that is important and not the type of film produced. The documentary method will not, I believe, remain fixed in a world defined, on the one side, by *Drifters* and, on the other, by *Nanook*. Already the limits have been expanded to embrace such a poem as *Coal Face* and such a piece of journalistic reporting as *Housing Problems*. Story, characterisation and studio are likely to enter the documentary film but it will be the method and not the materials that will count. It will be the sociological, political or other purposes being served by the method which will continue to be of first importance.

In short, the documentary method is more complex than its traditions would have us believe. No

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longer is the mere pictorial description of things and people and places of interest. Observation alone is not enough. Camera portrayal of movement, no matter how finely observed, is purely a matter of aesthetic good taste. The essential purposes of documentary lie in the ends applied to this observation. Conclusions must be indicated and the results of observation must be put across in a manner that demands high creative endeavour. Below the surface of the modern world lie the actuating economic issues of modern civilisation. These are the real materials of purposeful documentary. In Industry, Commerce, Civics and Nature the mere superficial portrayal of actuality is insufficient. Such surface description implies no intellectual ability. Rather are the implications and fulfilments of his material the concern of the documentalist. It is the meaning *behind* the thing and the significance *underlying* the person that are the inspirations for his approach. To the documentary method, every manufacture, every organisation, every function, every scheme of things represents at one point or another the fulfilment of a human interest.

In such circumstances, it seems improbable that your hero can still be the noble savage of Flaherty's choosing, or the centrifugal rhythms of a crankshaft which deceive the pseudo-realist's mind. No matter whether politics, culture, economics or religion, we are concerned with the impersonal forces that dictate this modern world. The puny individual must be refocussed into his normal relationship to the general mass, must take his place alongside in the community's

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solid struggle for existence and forsake personal achievement. Daily jobs, no matter how well described by rhetoric of camera and intimacy of microphone, are not documentary material in themselves. They must be related to the wider purposes of the community.

Above all, documentary must reflect the problems and realities of the present. It cannot regret the past; it is dangerous to prophecy the future. It can, and does, draw on the past in its use of existing heritages but it only does so to give point to a modern argument. In no sense is documentary a historical reconstruction and attempts to make it so are destined to failure. Rather is it contemporary fact and event expressed in relation to human associations.

Frequently I hear it said that documentary aims at a true statement of theme and incident. This is a mistaken belief. No documentary can be completely truthful, for there can be no such thing as truth while the changing developments in society continue to contradict each other. Not only this, but technical reasons also preclude the expression of a completely accurate representation. It is often suggested that documentary has close similarity to the news-reel. By the Trade they are naturally confused because they both, in their respective ways, deal with natural material.¹ But there the likeness ends. Their approach to and interpretation of that material is widely different. The essence of the documentary method lies in its

¹ 'The basis of all documentary, instructional and propaganda films is fundamentally the same as that of the news-reel. Truth.' *Kinematograph Weekly*, 25 October, 1934.

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dramatisation of actual material. The very act of dramatising causes a film statement to be false to actuality. We must remember that most documentary is only truthful in that it represents an attitude of mind. The aim of propaganda is persuasion and persuasion implies a particular attitude of mind towards this, that or the other subject. To be truthful within the technical limits of the camera and microphone demands description, which is the aim of the instructional film, and not dramatisation, which is the qualification of the documentary method. Thus even a plain statement of fact in documentary demands dramatic interpretation in order that it may be 'brought alive' on the screen.

We may assume, then, that documentary determines the approach to a subject but not necessarily the subject itself. Further, that this approach is defined by the aims behind production, by the director's intentions and by the forces making production a possibility. And because of the film camera's inherent capacity for reproducing a semblance of actuality and because the function of editing is believed to be the mainspring of film creation, it has so far been found that the best material for documentary purpose is naturally, and not artificially, contrived.

But it would be a grave mistake to assume that the documentary method differs from story-film merely in its preference for natural material. That would imply that natural material alone gives the distinction, which is untrue. To state that only documentary makes use of analytical editing methods is equally mistaken. At

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least one leading exponent of the documentary tradition (Flaherty) was creating the living scene in film before the scientific experiments of the Russians became common knowledge, while the latter have applied their methods of technique to many purely fictional films. To postulate that documentary is realistic as opposed to the romanticism of the story-film, with its theatrical associations, is again incorrect; for although documentary may be realistic in its concern with actuality, realism applies not only to the material but more especially to the method of approach to that material.

Such inspirations as I suggest are the essential aims of documentary demand a sense of social responsibility difficult to maintain in our world to-day. That I am fully prepared to admit. But, at the same time, your documentary director dare not be neutral, or else he becomes merely descriptive and factual.

The function that the film performs within the present social and political sphere, as indicated in our first chapter, must be kept constantly in mind. Relative freedom of expression for the views of the documentalist will obviously vary with the production forces he serves and the political system in power. In countries still maintaining a parliamentary system, discussion and projection of his beliefs within certain limits will be permitted only so long as they do not seriously oppose powerful vested interests, which most often happen to be the forces controlling production. Under an authoritarian system, freedom is permissible provided his opinions are in accord with those of the

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State for social and political advance, until presumably such a time shall arrive when the foundations of the State are strong enough to withstand criticism. Ultimately, of course, you will appreciate that you can neither make films on themes of your own choice, nor apply treatments to accepted themes, unless they are in sympathy with the aims of the dominant system. And in view of the mechanical and hence expensive materials of cinema, it will be foolish of the documentalist if his sympathies do not lie, or at least appear to lie, with those who can make production a possibility.

Four

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The progress of documentary has inevitably been disturbing, continually causing us to alter our opinions and often to change the nature of our approach to themes and natural material. Documentary is so closely related to current thought and activities that this continual change of interpretation, necessitating as it does a frequent re-orientation of theory, is an important factor which must not be overlooked in criticism. For this reason we cannot expect to lay down in these notes any academic, rule-of-thumb principles of technique. Each producer and each director is working out his or her own theory, each is discovering and developing his or her particular style, which in themselves will change according to the broader expansion of general principles. But we can, perhaps, touch upon certain aspects of technique and production which would appear common to most documentaries to-day because, by a simple discussion of these, we may acquire a wider knowledge of the documentary method.

From what we have discussed of its evolution and elementary principles, it can be seen that the sphere of documentary offers the whole living world from which to select subjects and material, a wealth of

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We may, then, pass on to a fuller examination of this attitude and concern ourselves with the materials and technical means that are at the disposal of the documentalist for the expression of such an attitude.

Any technical discussion, however, should be prefaced by an emphasis on the difference that exists between the documentary film and its relation to the spectator in the audience and that of the story-film, although in many cases the two types of film appear next to each other in the same programme.

Documentary is not concerned with what is usually called 'a plot', meaning a sequence of fictional events revolving round imaginary individuals and the situations that develop from their behaviour. Rather is it concerned with a theme, which in turn is expressive of a definite purpose, thus demanding from an audience an attention quite different from that of a fictional story. In the latter, the reaction of the spectator lies in the projection of his or her character and personality into those of the actors playing in the story and the ultimate result of a series of fictional complications. The individual incidents and emotions are more important than anything else. Years of cinema-going, moreover, have taught the audience almost exactly what to expect in the entertainment film. Stories and characters have become so stereotyped that their essential ingredients may be counted on the fingers of your two hands. Instead of developing the story to imaginative ends, commercial cinema has placed most of its faith in the star-system, which serves as an efficient disguise for the avoidance of subjects bearing a relation

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to actuality and offers ample opportunity for the exploitation of sex stimuli which has been found so profitable among repressed bourgeois societies.

Documentary to-day presents an exactly opposite appeal. It has no individualised story, no much-publicised star and none of the rich trappings and expensive flim-flams of the story-film. That is why the renters say they cannot sell it. Documentary relies exclusively on the belief that there is nothing so interesting to ourselves as ourselves. It depends on the individual's interest in the world around him. It bases its appeal on the community's undeniable zest for getting about the world and, more difficult, on the drama of events that lies at one's own doorstep. If there are human beings they are secondary to the main theme. Their private passions and petulances are of little interest. For the most part they perform their natural behaviour as in normal life. The dramatisation and characterisation lie not in their hands but in the method of the director. They are types selected from the many, portraying the mind and character of this or that social group. If there are spectacular scenes, they again are only present because they are typical and because they develop naturally from the subject, such as the climax of *Man of Aran*, the Buddha sequence in *Song of Ceylon*, the storm in *Weather Forecast* and the coming to the surface in *Coal Face*. Documentary has always a specific purpose to fulfil and it is that purpose which is intended to be of first interest to the spectator.

After watching documentaries being shown to audiences of the most conflicting types in various parts



B.B.C : THE VOICE OF BRITAIN (Grierson & Legg)

IMAGES D'OSTENDE (Storck)



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of Britain, it is my experience that your audience gives greater attention to documentary than to story-film. Fleeting emotions and transient good looks are quickly forgotten but issues of wide significance have a habit of sticking in the mind. In watching documentary, the audience is continually noting distinctions and analysing situations and probing the 'why' and 'wherefore'. For this reason, you will observe that an audience will see and respond to a documentary film more than once, whereas a story-film must be exceptionally good to command a revival. Not only this, but the absence of plot and stars compels the audience to be more sensitive to the methods of presentation. Poor photography, bad editing and unimaginative sound immediately become apparent, whereas in a story-film the thrill of the situation itself will often compensate for inadequate technical treatment. This is not to suggest that the audience is, or should be, interested in technique as such, for that would be wholly defeating the purposeful ends of documentary, but that the nature of documentary is such that, unless the technique is good, its faults are more noticeable than in the story-film where there are other factors to absorb the attention.

Without good craftsmanship, propaganda would clearly never attain its ends. Without sincerity and clarity, documentary would fail in its purpose of holding the audience. On the other hand, technique must never be permitted to play the most important part in documentary. Subject and theme must always come first. It is only for their full and lasting expression

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that good craftsmanship is necessary. Criticism of documentary departs from criticism of story-films not in its disregard of craftsmanship, but in its stress upon the purpose which that craftsmanship should serve.

The subjects of documentary must be presented as clearly and concisely as possible. Every point in the argument must be capable of being quickly grasped and lead straight on to its successor, or else the audience will lose the thread of the theme. The co-ordination of sight and sound must be without any possibilities of confusion. For this reason, it is my contention that documentary should be short, not longer than three or four reels at the most, within which footage a great deal can be said with force and lasting impression. In this present age of speed, there is no time for laboured argument. Thirty minutes is a long time to ask for the undivided attention of a cinema audience.

Most documentaries are conceived in broad dimensions of a full-blooded feature picture; but most documentaries grow shorter as the film begins to take shape. No matter the bigness of the subject or width of location, documentary must tell its message without elaboration or repetition. Directness of expression alone will permit implications to be drawn and conclusions to be reached. Many subjects have the habit of presenting a dozen good-looking facets, offshoots of the major theme. It is pursuance of these that so often leads to overlength and consequent dullness; to sequences grand enough in themselves but incidental to the main march of the theme. This, I feel, was one of the mistakes made in the film *B.B.C: The Voice of*

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Britain, probably because of the large scope of the subject.

Shortness of footage is nothing of which the documentalist need be ashamed. Two reels of documentary, straight to the point and powerfully said, are worth a dozen feature pictures of labouring insignificance. Thirty odd minutes of deliberate concentration from a modern audience is worth a week of leisurely contemplation. And with the persuasive force of good technique to hand, with sight and sound to bring alive the modern world, more can be said in half an hour than any documentary maker has so far had to say.

At an earlier stage, some mention has been made of the position of the individual artist in the cinema. It was suggested that, while economic issues underlying the amusement film have reduced the individual mind to what amounts to a cog in the machine, documentary offers very considerable opportunities for the expression of the individual artist's outlook. This, however, is not wholly true.

Social documentary deals with issues and subjects upon which no single individual is qualified to make statements or draw conclusions without expert collaboration. The scope of propaganda, especially if directed to political or social ends, is so wide that it would be indiscreet, as well as impracticable, to permit the individual artist to dictate his own theme and its treatment. The more we investigate documentary as a propagandist weapon, the more shall we realise that the question of theme and subject is, just as in story-film, a matter for general discussion; but that the

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actual interpretation in terms of cinema is a matter for the individual artist working, not alone, but in co-operation with other artists. In other words, I am suggesting that documentary, like story-film, should be the result of collective working but that, unlike the story-film, co-operation should be directed to a common end and not riddled with rivalry born of personal advancement. This, I believe, can only be possible if there is a common social purpose to be achieved. Maybe it is satisfactory for your sentimental director to sojourn in his island, secure in splendid isolation, so long as he is content to treat themes removed from significant contemporary importance. But the documentalist working on the home front, expressing aspects of social and economic problems that often concern a whole community, must look outside his own mind if his work is to be of any value.

In this connection it will be remembered that after the success of *Drifters*, both from a propagandist and an economic point of view, Grierson made the point that the establishment of the E.M.B. Film Unit as a propagandist body depended, not on the making of one film by one director at a time, but upon being able to make half a dozen films by half a dozen directors working in co-operation with each other. And by selecting and training personnel with complementary talents, by persuading artists to work co-operatively instead of competitively, Grierson has succeeded in his object.

This whole question of collective working is, I feel, extremely important to the future development of

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any production based on propaganda. I personally should be a great deal happier about the progress of documentary in this country if I saw a move towards the establishment of Units rather than the isolated success of an occasional one-man picture. Before that can be possible, however, not only have economic bases for such Units to be forthcoming, but there must be found persons who are qualified to assume the difficult tasks of producer.

I. THE FUNCTION OF THE PRODUCER

In documentary, the activities and abilities of a producer are unquestionably wider than those of a director. At first glance, possibly, his duty would seem to be concerned principally with the difficult task of equating business interests with creative production. In practice, the responsibilities lie deeper. Again, at a first consideration, the actual technical creator of films would appear to be the man who really matters. But, in point of fact, it is the producer who controls the development of several directors and several productions working to a general theory that is the big mind of documentary production. I make this distinction between producer and director with emphasis because their difference and relationship will be closely bound up with future developments.

Often enough your producer is himself something of an artist, a theorist who is happy to see his ideas put into concrete form by capable directors and cameramen. But, more often, your producer is serving only

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the hard ends of profit and consequently feels it his authority to suppress the creative endeavour of his directors in the supposed gain to the balance sheet. In such cases a director can have little respect for his producer, a situation that can in the long run end only in abortive production. The needs of documentary are such that there must be, at the least, a sympathetic co-operation between producer and director; or else the one abuses his authoritative status while the other resorts to craft, neither of which can aid the already complex process of documentary production.

Naturally your producer must be familiar with all sides of practical production. In the most satisfactory cases, he has arrived at his job through previous experience as a director. Because, if he is unappreciative of the actual problems of production, he will be unfitted either to select the right directors for the right films or to analyse their respective and many indiscretions. As our practical estimate proceeds, it will be more clearly seen that the pitfalls confronting the documentary director are numerous. In the light of his wider experience, it is the job of the producer to put his finger on this or that weakness during actual production, as well as in the preliminary stages of scriptwork and during the final pulling together of a film, yet at the same time not to abuse the creative freedom of his directors. Through his sympathetic understanding of what they are trying to do, he must be able to check their divergences without interfering with their freedom and convictions. There is neither aesthetic nor economic sense in giving a director a free

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hand for nine months and then, in half an hour, attacking the results, as has happened in commercially organised documentary. That is both unfair to the director and failing to meet the requirements of honest film production.

As in every other aspect of documentary, the capabilities of the producer need to be quite different from those of the story-film producer, not only because the whole method of production is different but primarily because the ends to be served demand a new outlook. The activities of the studio producer are, for the most part, quite neatly decided by the appearance of the balance sheet. His whole regard for the directors and technicians working under him is governed, quite simply, by money-making and precedent. But your documentary producer is meeting the requirements of bodies or persons who have a wider purpose to serve than immediate financial returns. Propaganda and education cannot, fortunately, be summed up in terms of hard cash. Not only have immediate effects to be taken into consideration but, more importantly, the effects of propaganda over a considerable period of time must be reckoned with. Story-films hit or miss within a few months of their production. Documentary, in its only sensible form, extends over a period of years—in theatre, classroom and village hall—and its value cannot be immediately assessed. For this obvious reason, the position of the documentary producer is full of responsibility—to his sponsors, to education, to his directors and, last but not least, to his own social conscience.

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Moreover, the subjects and themes of documentary are not the ephemeral and sensational entertainment of the story-film. On the contrary, the material from which documentary is made, as we have already seen, may often be dull and uninspiring. In many cases, where there is no chance of exciting climax or thrilling tempos, the director will often reach a point of revulsion, not of disinterest but of positive dislike for his material. It is then that the producer fulfils one of his most valuable functions: to keep the director at his problem until the moment of enlightenment arrives. It is, as Grierson has pointed out, the sponsors of documentary—the educationalists, the industrialists and the politicians—who really control the destiny of documentary and who make possible the practical work of its directors. And it falls to the lot of the producer to balance one with another.

Relations between producer and director we have already mentioned. But let us make it clear that it is the function of the producer to *develop*, as well as to guide and control, the directors employed by him. Sympathy and understanding are elementary essentials: beyond them must lie confidence enough to allow a director time and footage with his subject and patience during production. These are fundamental requirements. Too often do we see documentaries mutilated by insistence on speed (to meet profit demands) and directors discouraged by last minute interference about matters upon which agreement should have been reached at outset.

Lastly, there is this question of the importance of

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theory and discussion. Documentary is, as we have seen, a fairly new development of cinema: new in that it demands a fresh attitude, not only towards technical apparatus and craftsmanship, but towards purposes in view and results to be obtained.

Theory, then, and its requisite, experiment, is vital to documentary progress and it is in your producer, I believe, that theory should principally reside; to be practised, rightly or wrongly, by the directors and technicians for whose work he is in so many ways responsible.

For the producer, in his status of keeping a general control over production, is in a more advantageous position to theorise than the director, who is absorbed with the immediate problems of the job in hand. Not only this, but there comes a time in film making when, I think, the excitement of going out with a camera or assembling your film strips on the cutting-bench begins to fade. There comes a moment (it may be only transitional) when you become more interested in the first working out of a problem and the theories which it involves than in the carrying out of the actual work itself. Eisenstein, so report goes, since his tragic experience in Mexico, has found more interest in creating within his mind the working out of a film than in the production itself, with the result that after the scenario has been written and the film planned, he has no enthusiasm to put his ideas onto celluloid. Over the last year or two he has done immensely interesting work in his G.I.K. lectures, for which much research has been necessary, and we may perhaps consider the

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point that his work as instructor and investigator has been more valuable to cinema than if he had continued production.

We must also remember in this connection that it was not until some years after their making that Eisenstein realised the theoretical importance of his experiments in *Strike* and *Potemkin*. I think I am right in saying that it was not until his visit to Europe and America that he really studied Marx; and I am quite sure that the significance of the theories of movement and conflict, which were demonstrated practically in *Potemkin* and *October*, were not realised until a much later date when Eisenstein became more concerned with theory than with practice.

In many ways the case of Grierson is similar. *Drifters* was made almost impulsively, carrying out certain preconceived theories of documentary, but I doubt if Grierson appreciated the full value of his experiment while he was making the film. I am not now referring to economic means of production but to aesthetic and technical elements. It is probable that the real significance of the creative treatment of actuality in *Drifters* was not apparent until Grierson turned producer and began his important work of creating a school of documentary. To-day, for example, he is at his best when viewing and discussing some director's 'rushes' in the theatre, during which he will touch on and afterwards expand half a dozen lines of thought provoked by the raw material on the screen.

As yet no one else in documentary has attempted this difficult but all-important task of producer-

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teacher, but we find some indications of a similar tendency arising in the amusement cinema. Both Lubitsch and Disney have progressed from the status of directors to that of producers, controlling a unit of technicians under their theory and guidance. Results of the Lubitsch-Paramount experiment are yet to be seen but there can be no doubt as to the success of the Disney methods of production. It would not be fair to conclude these remarks on the importance of the producer without mention of Erich Pommer, although his skill and patience are too widely known as being the real genius behind the great years of the German cinema for further elaboration.

II. THE FUNCTION OF THE DIRECTOR

A. Visual

(i) The Film Strip

Not without reason is the motion-picture screen shaped like a picture postcard. Nor is it really strange that so many makers of films still regard the images out of which the visuals of a film are made as a series of views. Elsewhere, we have mentioned that the medium of creative cinema may be understood from two widely different points of view. Here, in our exploration of practice, we may amplify our original analysis because it is partly upon this division of opinion as to the use of the fundamental materials of cinema that there rests the difference between story and documentary film technique.

Expressed crudely, a film is in actuality a series of

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views placed one after (below) another on a screen in such a manner that the spectator may, with the aid of reproduced sound and speech, grasp the meaning not only of one view but of the whole collection as they succeed each other at a speed of twenty-four to the second. The mechanical apparatus of film making—cameras, microphones and the rest—will ensure a reasonably faithful record to be made both aurally and visually of objects or persons placed before it for reproduction. But it is also obvious that there is nothing creative in so using the instruments of cinema. There is nothing particularly satisfying in being able to reproduce photographically and aurally a straightforward scene, whether it be of everyday life or artificially contrived in a studio built for the purpose. If cinema is to be used imaginatively, its instruments must be manipulated with a creative method in view. The scenes which it reproduces must be something more than mere reproductions, no matter even if the material chosen for reproduction has been creatively arranged. There must be creation *in the very act of using* the mechanical apparatus, so that the representation before the audience can be 'made to live'.

The process of film making, or creation, is more complex than mere reproduction, although the story-films of to-day would hardly confirm this fact. A director assembles and selects in terms of his medium various creative forces and preferences incited by almost every part of his being. At one and the same time, he considers his theme and his actors, his special approach and his innumerable angles of vision, his lighting and

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his changing shapes of composition; he imagines his sounds and the speed of his movements, visualises the assembling and contemplates the eventual effect on the screen. All these distinct but closely related ideas and materials are arranged, developed, suspended, dispersed and brought together again—gradually becoming fused into a unified film under the will of the director and the guidance of his producer. And in the successful film, these elements are closely interwoven, so that the unity achieved by their fusion is of greater value than simply their sum.

Any collaboration of a reasonably skilled photographer and a sound-recordist can relate the material physical facts about an object or person simply by showing them on the screen with their synchronised sound. That is the basis of the travel picture and the news-reel. To reveal their objective meaning and essential reasons for existence, to relate them to broad references and make their presence significant, demands a sensibility and conscience that are found only in the creative director.

To use the familiar axiom of the painter Delacroix, nature is only a dictionary to the artist. The documentalist goes to nature, or actuality, for his visual and aural imagery in the same way that a writer goes to a dictionary for the proper sense and spelling of a word. But just as a dictionary is not a great work of literature, neither is a series of photographic views (however lovely in themselves), nor a chain of recorded sounds of natural objects and persons projected on a screen and through a loudspeaker, a documentary film. It is the reason

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underlying the choice of natural material, and the purpose which is in mind for bringing it to life on the screen—that really constitute film creation.

Documentary involves everything in life that has emotional and intellectual value. It is the task of the director to select persons, events and objects from the cross-section of the world at large and to dramatise them—to draw out their emotional value and to put them on the isolated screen-area in the darkened theatre to interpret his purpose. There is little within reason and little within the limits of censorship that documentary cannot bring before an audience to state an argument. Each image and sound of the many from which the film is composed is a realisation of a fragment of life.

Technically, the success of a film as a unified work depends upon its final cohesion in the minds of the audience. Although the film director works in terms of fragments of sound and picture, he must always consider of greater importance the effect of their sum. On the other hand, he must be certain that there is a definite concentration of vision in every shot he takes and a definite focus of sound in every noise he records. Whether moving or static, each image must be dynamic in its attack on the senses of the observer. It must arrest the attention of the most lethargic spectator, appeal to and infect that unconscious response to emotion which is present to some degree in every human being.

Actually, the process of reception by an audience is swifter than description implies. Our reaction to a single visual image, or the combined effect of a series

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of visual images, is practically instantaneous. The effect on our minds has taken place almost before we are aware of the image on the screen. The process is emotional. But it ceases to be such the moment we form a distinct idea of it, giving way to the meaning of the shot, or shots, which is always last to arrive in our perception. For this purpose the characteristic mechanics of the medium, with its swiftly changing visual images of conflict, achieves perhaps a greater purity of mind for audience reception than any other medium of expression.

Proceeding from analysis of sequence to analysis of a single shot, the whole illusion of movement in a strip of film lies in the fact that two static visual images, the second printed below the first on a band of moving celluloid, follow one another in juxtaposition: the relation of the one to the next causing us to believe that we are seeing a single movement. This very simple act, performed with remarkable accuracy by the machinery of cinema (camera, printer and projector), is the beginning of all investigation into the technique of cinematography.

(ii) Movement and Symphonics

From an aesthetic and technical point of view, movement is the most important of all elements contained in film creation. The capacity for movement of the subject-material being filmed, the mechanical movements of the camera and of the celluloid itself, are fundamental characteristics of the film medium. Movement of context, movement of continuity, they

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are vital requirements to the expression of a theme by the film medium, without which adequate interpretation would be impossible. The composition of film strips from which a complete film is made up, frame after frame, shot after shot, produces nothing but an illusion of movement. It is, in fact, a process based upon a series of conflicts which, by juxtaposition, results in an *appearance* of movement from something which, in reality, is completely static. Frame to frame, shot to shot, sequence to sequence, the interpretation is purely a matter of movements meeting and arising from the intrinsic structure of the medium.

Movement, in all its many forms, is the element in cinema that most creates feeling on the part of the audience. Almost every degree of human emotion and reaction may be provoked, both mentally and physically, by the appearance of movement. Thus, I feel, some study of movement and its relation to the film will play an important part in giving to documentary those emotions of which I have deplored the absence.

Expressive movement, in itself, is life; and sensation, interpreted through speech and gesture, is an expression of movement. The relation between words and gestures is of paramount importance because it involves the whole question of human portrayal on the screen, a problem which we have already discussed and to which we shall return later. The one arises naturally from the other or, on occasions, both are simultaneous. Observation will reveal, I think, that it is really a matter of personal character. But, from a film point of view, it is the gesture which is of principal interest, both in itself as

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an expression of feeling and in relation to its context. We are all aware of the part played by mime in the silent film; of the heavy, mannered style of symbolic acting developed by the Germans and the immense value placed by Chaplin on pantomime. We may remember, also, the Pudovkin experiments with spoken titles inserted, not at their moment of utterance, but at the emotional peak of the situation. In the theatre your actor creates an impression of emotion very largely through gesture, and the audience, child-like, will imitate the emotions thus indicated. In cinema, the same principle is used but it is expanded from actors to events, seeking to express intellectual argument, not only through the mouthpiece of characters, but through the events in which they participate.

In the film, the scope of its technical qualities and the inherent characteristics of the medium itself make perfectly possible the removal of the individual actor. The audience may still be emotionally influenced by the rhythmic movements of the event. For from events, whether improvised or natural, there spring rhythms governed by the significant meaning of the situations. It is by interpreting these rhythms on the screen that the film director can best emotionally disturb the audience. The process of movement and its rhythms may sometimes even become the context of the film, as with the Continental Realists. Therein lies, I suggest, one of the fundamental distinctions between theatre and cinema. And it is the study of these movements and their utilisation for the interpretation of social relationships that constitutes one of the first

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problems confronting the documentalist, upon which he must spend much time and thought.

Probably the best-known example of movement expressing the context of a scene is the famous Odessa Steps sequence in *Potemkin*, a scene that appears to create a remarkable response from audiences of the most varied kind. In Eisenstein's own analysis of the sequence (made at a later date than the film) he attributes the whole emotional response of the audience to the comparative rhythms of the event; to the steady machine-rhythm of the advancing line of troops being thrown into conflict with the scattered crowd before it, with the broken rhythm of the perambulator isolated as a clue, a prominent rhythm in itself, to the whole conflict. He has invited comparison between the emotions aroused by this scene and the emotions provoked by the performance of an actor like Jannings, thereby indicating the fundamental distinctions that exist between the cinematic and the theatrical methods of stimulating emotion.

The *Potemkin* incident was, of course, admirably suited in every respect for portrayal by this method of comparative rhythms. Not all documentary subjects contain the same material for sensational event. At the same time, it is the rhythm, or rhythms, of the event that constitute the primary factors by which the documentalist will arouse the emotions of his audience. It is for these that he must search when analysing his subject. The important issue arising from the Odessa Steps scene is that emotional response of a very powerful kind can be provoked without the per-

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formance of individual actors; that the rhythms of an event can, if put together in such a way, express an attitude.

But, and here exists the danger of misusing the employment of rhythms to interpret an event, the movement within a certain sequence must always be considered in relation to the meaning it reveals and can never, except in the pseudo-realist documentary, be used for its own effect. Movement is not only connected with the material within the scene but with the movement of the context, by which may be understood literary movement. The Continental Realists, as we have seen, were almost wholly occupied with the representation of movement *as movement*. In every case they failed to appreciate that there was a meaning underlying their rhythms quite separate from their aesthetic appeal. They were meant, these *Berlins*, to be concerned with a superficial rendering of movement as an idea. In aesthetic contemplation it was forgotten that their rhythms stood as symbols of an epoch and that there is no real value in movement itself. They shot, these aesthetes, the rhythms of a rotary-press or the parade of a milk-bottling machine and rested content with the visual effects of movement. They did not, for a moment, realise that these repetitive rhythms, beautiful to watch in themselves, raised important materialist issues of the man at the machine, of the social and economic problems lying behind modern machinery and transport.

Not until we come to such an approach as Wright's in his West Indian pictures do we find the symphonic

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treatment of movement bent to a definite purpose. The banana loading in *Cargo from Jamaica* and the sugar-cane cutting in *Windmill in Barbados* were both shot and cut in terms of movement and rhythms. But there arose from that symphonic treatment a sociological meaning—a comment upon the exploitation of coloured labour by Western capitalism which invited a more profound consideration than the pseudo-realist approach of the *Berlin* school. And it is this deeper use of the symphonic method that prompts us to consider it divorced from its early applications, that is to say put to a sociological or other propagandist purpose and not using it merely as an end in itself.

The symphonic form is based upon the predetermined arrangement, or orchestration, of movement. Film is conceived as an uninterrupted flow of movement; incidents and crises and happenings arising from the action being enveloped into the unbroken flow of continuity. And, as in the case cited from *Potemkin*, it incorporates all kinds of cross or comparative movements in its stride, building not only from sympathetically related movements but also from conflicts and opposing movements. It embraces a movement, or series of movements, for each sequence developing from its theme; but it must be emphasised that these movements arise from the material and are not a superimposed framework deliberately laid on to the material. Rather do they result from, and are made to convey, a definite attitude to the subject; and it is this attitude and its expression which are of the greatest interest to the documentary method.

THE SONG OF CEYLON (Wright)



GRANTON TRAWLER (Grierson & Anstey)

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Two motives, moreover, underlie movement: purpose and material weight. It is these that give rise to a second kind of symphonic form, as distinct from that described above. A form that incorporates dramatic issues which are arrived at through the tensions arising from the meeting of conflicts. All the energies and reactions contained within movement are caught and, through technical means, made the mainspring of the movement, thus introducing the familiar elements of drama—suspense and climax—into the symphonic form. And, as with our first or musical method, it is the overtone arising from the clash of movements and from the interpolation, at given points, of clues to the energies concerned, that leads you to understand the director's attitude to his material, that defines the purpose underlying the documentary approach, that gives the film meaning beyond pure description.

Grierson gives a useful example of this approach from his film *Granton Trawler*:

'The trawler is working its gear in a storm. The tension elements are built up with emphasis on the drag of the water, the heavy lurching of the ship, the fevered flashing of birds, the fevered flashing of faces between wave lurches and spray. The trawl is hauled aboard with strain of men and tackle and water. It is opened in a release which comprises equally the release of men, birds and fish. There is no pause in the flow of movement, but something of an effort as between two opposing forces has been recorded. In a more ambitious and deeper description the tension might have included elements more in-

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timately and more heavily descriptive of the clanging weight of the tackle, the strain on the ship, the operation of the gear under water and along the ground, the scuttering myriads of birds laying off in the gale. The fine fury of ship and heavy weather could have been brought through to touch the vitals of the men and the ship. In the hauling, the simple fact of a wave breaking over the men, subsiding, and leaving them hanging on as though nothing had happened, would have brought the sequence to an appropriate peak. The release could have attached to itself images of, say, birds wheeling high, taking off from the ship, and of contemplative, *i.e.* more intimate, reaction on the faces of the men. The drama would have gone deeper by the greater insight into the energies and reactions involved.¹

The main differences between this method of approach and that of the purely musical method, as well exemplified in Wright's work, are too obvious to require explanation. That is not to say that the one is superior to the other. It is a matter of the director's personal feeling towards his material, offset by the purpose which his picture is meant to serve.

To these we may add a third element of symphonic form, the introduction of poetic images from which atmosphere and mood may arise. In this approach, there is description but without tension or dramatic suspense. Instead there is what we may call a poetic imagery, manifesting itself in symbolic reference to,

¹ 'The Symphonic Film', John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. II, no. 3.

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usually, a natural association of ideas. This was, I imagine, the method of symphonic form which Eisenstein intended using in *Que Viva Mexico*, as a development of the creation of mood from poetic images with which he experimented in *Romance Sentimentale*. Both Machaty and Dovjenko are also exponents of the imagist method; the former in his concluding sequence to *Ekstase* and the latter in *Ivan*. It is a method that pursues the creation of mood from rhythms, as in the musical form, but gives the mood a fullness of illumination by reference to attendant poetic images, at once contemplative and literary in quality. It takes a common event and enlarges upon the actual happening by a wide reference to its many associations, human and otherwise. It brings the element of poetry, by visual and aural image, to illuminate the commonplace. And it is this integration of images with movement that creates the hang-over impression when the film is past and done.

All of these forms may appear in the same film, their use being entirely dependent on the outlook and particular characteristics of the director. They are important here, in our brief analysis of movement, because, as I have tried to make clear, it is the overtonal element arising from their use that, together with symbolism and irony, gives expression to the director's attitude. All three manipulations of movement and tempo, in close relation to the handling of camera and sound, arrive at their richest use in the dialectic treatment of a theme; upon which, in fact, as we shall see later, they really depend.

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It will, I hope, be grasped from these comments that the analysis and interpretation of movement, in all its forms, to express theme and attitude constitute perhaps the most easily recognisable difference between documentary and the ordinary descriptive film of natural material. Their presence in a film, either separately or together, indicates at least that the director is working with a creative understanding of his medium; and not merely relying on the machinery of cinema, assisted by good photography and realistic sound, to record actual fact.

(iii) Natural Material

(a) **The Actor: Natural and Professional.** The problem of film acting and the place of the professionally trained actor in the cinema is not peculiar to the story-film. What we mean by 'acting' is, in fact, closely bound up with the whole principles of the documentary method and is providing a most difficult problem for the documentalist. The relationship of man to the society in which he moves is one of the fundamental perplexities of documentary. It is more. It is one of the most vital problems of modern civilisation and is occupying the attention of every thinking person to-day.

Opinions differ so widely on the problem of whether acting is an inherent part of film creation and, if so, in what lies the difference between stage and screen acting, that we should do well to try to analyse their essential distinctions. We should realise, however, that the immaturity of the cinema renders any but its



MOTHER (Pudovkin)

MEN AND JOBS (Macharet)

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elementary principles open to contradiction, whereas the traditions and conventions of the theatre lie deep-rooted in years of precedent. There is, you can safely say, some fixed opinion as to what does, and what does not, constitute 'good' acting on the stage to-day, that is within the orthodox limits of the stage as generally accepted by its critics. And since most Western story-films still rely on the transference, or rather the adaptation, of the theatre style to film technique, we may assume that the majority of so-called actors of the cinema are judged according to standards derived originally from the stage. That is to say, they set out to achieve the same end of characterisation although the methods employed are slightly different. The one must make allowance for the mechanical reproduction of the cinema apparatus; the other must rely upon the illusion that is the basis of the theatre medium.

Now, in the theatre, the stage upon which an actor performs has a real existence and definite spatial dimensions. In order to pass from one side to the other, your actor must walk that distance in so many steps in a given period of time. Separated from the stage by a definite space, at varying distances and varying eye-levels, there sits the audience. Thus it is clear that any speech or gesture on the part of the actor on the stage must be capable of travelling across the intervening gap, so as to be comprehensible both aurally and visually to the audience. This can only be achieved by a deliberate emphasis on the part of the actor. So much is obvious.

Such limitations naturally lead to a peculiar

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technique being adopted by the stage actor. He cannot behave as in real life. If he whispers, he must whisper loudly, so that the audience at the back of the theatre may hear. Unless he employs certain forms of word enunciation, the greater part of the audience will be unable to hear what he says. Unless he exaggerates his facial expressions and uses grease-paint to heighten his features, the audience will not notice the change in his facial movements, let alone understand the meaning which he is trying to convey across the intervening space.

The stage actor, then, quite apart from the other factors of theatrecraft, has to learn special methods of speaking and possess a special knowledge of exaggerated gesture before he can undertake to represent a fictitious character to an audience.

Further, the aim of the theatre is to perform a play as many times to as large an audience as wishes to see the piece. In other words, not one but many performances are necessary of a successful play in order to satisfy the potential audience. So that the actor has not only to learn the tricks of his technique for one demonstration of a particular character, but he must be able to adopt this unnatural and artificial behaviour on many occasions. He must repeat his tricks over and over again and still appear fresh until the public is tired. He must be able to cut himself off abruptly from his normal everyday existence and to assume the mind, behaviour, feelings and often the physical appearance of an imaginary person. To do this demands great skill, for in each of these manifestations he must rely

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almost entirely upon himself. Artificial lighting and stage-effects are there to help him, but at base the success of the portrayal lies in his own ability.

When we come to examine the screen, however, we find a wholly different state of affairs. Firstly, because the nature of film is an illusion of movement created by passing a celluloid band of images through a projector, it is clear that the actor's movements are not governed by actual time or confined within real space. We may see him begin to walk across a room and then pick him up on the other side, thereby deliberately eliminating a portion of space and time. Secondly, the capability of the camera for isolating comprehensive views, near views, close-ups, etc., at once destroys the significance of the distance between screen and audience. That distance still exists, but the illusion of the constantly changing views unconsciously draws the audience first near to, and then perhaps far from, the object shown on the screen within the limit of a second or two. The movie camera possesses the god-like vision of the remote and the minute. Should the actor desire a special movement of his hand to be observed by the audience, he has no need to emphasise it himself, as in the theatre, because the camera can isolate that single gesture and show it alone in a magnified size so that the audience cannot fail to grasp its meaning. But, and this is the important point, the emphasis no longer rests with the actor but with the camera.

Theoretically, the actor need employ no tricks or peculiar technique. He must remain natural, as in normal life, and the probing selectivity of the camera,

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under the director's control, will translate the meaning of his 'acting' to the audience. If necessary, his movements may be slowed down or made faster in order that attention may be drawn to them. Pudovkin will use slow-motion to show the beginning of a smile. And, in addition, the actor and his movements may be observed from almost any point of view.

To continue, as in the theatre so in the cinema is it essential that the performance should be repeated many times. But the nature of the cinema is such that the multiplication is made by machinery. Theoretically, the actor's emotions need be expressed only once for registration on to negative, after which all else is purely a matter of mechanical processing. Thus his 'acting', if such it can still be called, may be both spontaneous and natural and even his most transient moments may be fixed on to celluloid for all practical time.

So much, then, for some of the elementary differences between stage and film performance.

But we must go further. By now it is familiar to most people that the underlying principles of filmcraft are based on the manipulation of the celluloid lengths which bear upon them the fragments of 'acting' performed by the actor. No matter how he has 'acted' in the studio, his representation on the screen is conditioned by the manner in which his fragments of 'acting' are pieced together. Other actors or inanimate objects, which may have no real relation to him and were not even within eyesight or earshot at the time of his studio performance, may be brought into relation



B.B.C: THE VOICE OF BRITAIN (Grierson & Legg)



PHILIPS-RADIO (Ivens)

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one of the most serious shortcomings of the documentary film has been its continued evasion of the human being; and that the most difficult problem facing the documentalist to-day is the need for the characterisation of individuals in his films. The same problem has, quite naturally in view of its political and sociological implications, fully occupied the attention of the Soviet film technicians. From the first experiments of Eisenstein, with the transference of *Commedia dell' Arte* types into the types of his film *Strike* in 1923, up to the extremely lively discussions at the conference in Moscow¹ and the reception accorded the Vassilev Brothers' *Chapaev*, the story of Soviet cinema has been the story of the cinematic representation of the human being.

Eisenstein, at one time a pupil of Mayerhold, originally worked in the Proletcult Theatre which he turned into the theatre of acrobats. The traditional types and spontaneous acting methods of the *Commedia dell' Arte* had a curious fascination for him and, in particular, influenced three of his productions with which he toured the factories. In this industrial setting, he apparently realised the spatial limits of the stage and, deciding that the factory itself must find a means of expression, turned to the wider possibilities of cinema. This was, I gather, just about the same time as Kuleshov and Pudovkin were experimenting with the juxtaposition of film strips and first principles of montage.

From *Strike*, with its dozen or so typical characters,

¹ Moscow Film Festival, January 1935.

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to *Potemkin* was a tremendous step. Expanding the idea of typage, Eisenstein set out to achieve 'not only a few faces but hundreds which should not *act* but be' and we get the birth of the mass film fulfilling the political requirements of the era. We get also, but not realised until much later, the importance of conflicting movements and in the Odessa Steps sequence the first indications that the rhythm of an event can be as emotionally powerful as the performance of an actor.

Pudovkin, on the other hand, was trying to express his themes through definite individuals, types drawn from and typical of the mass, attempting a synthesis between professional and natural actors.

'Watching other *régisseurs* at work in those early days,' he wrote, 'I studied the difference between the actor's movements and gestures, while he was consciously acting for the camera, and his natural movements in reaction to various normal stimuli. I was attracted to analysing these natural movements, but even when I started work on *Mother* I wasn't clear why I found more dynamic material in the natural behaviour of the actor than in his conceived performance.

'Both Baranovskaia and Batalov, the mother and son of the film, were theatre artists with almost no experience of the cinema. With them I came face to face with the problems which were occupying my mind, but, being uncertain, I at first left them to themselves. The result was that effects, which moved me in the theatre, appeared to me in the studio as false and schematic.

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‘I began then to remove from the actor all that seemed to me to be exaggerated. I rooted out every attempt of the actor to show off his ability. I began to collaborate with him in finding the actual emotional state and, in addition, eliminating all unnecessary movement. I looked for those small details and shades of expression which are difficult to find, but which reflect the inner psychology of man. I took these subtle characteristics and fixed them on the film until I had a collection of human portraits. For the most part, these shots were motionless, or reproduced hardly noticeable movements.

‘I gave these isolated portraits form, and a dynamic continuity by the process of montage. I found the way to build up a dialogue in which the transition of the actor from one emotional state to another (a change from glumness to a smile in response to a joke) had never taken place in actuality before the camera. I shot the actor at different times, glum and then smiling, and only on my editing table did these two separate moods co-ordinate with the third—the man who made the joke.’¹

Eisenstein, however, continued with the theory of completely impersonal approach and finally entered the documentary field in *October*. It was the supreme example of a film without hero or plot, which, in the opinion of Dinamov, was a very dangerous theory. ‘It was a number of events without definite characters. Such material needs great talent to express but those

¹ ‘Acting—The Cinema *v.* the Theatre’, V. I. Pudovkin, *The Criterion*, vol. XIII, no. L.



MOSCOW (Kaufman)



IVAN (Dovjenko)

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pictures are not pictures of the mass. The mass must have its leaders. In *Potemkin* and *October* there was only a crowd.' Obviously it was this absence of emotion and lack of characterisation that made Eisenstein choose a central figure as a heroine in *The General Line*. But being apparently unable to grasp the social and economic issues of his subject, he sidetracked the whole thing with artificial trickeries of symbolism—his worst enemy. Eight years later we find him saying: 'The intellectual cinema—the vulgar definition of an intellectual film is a film without emotional feelings—is too vulgar to consider. *The General Line* was an intellectual film.'

Working down in the Ukraine, Dovjenko was meeting the same problems. Each of his films, *Zvenigora*, *Arsenal*, *Earth* and *Ivan*, reflected the same struggle. His sense of poetry, his philosophic acceptance of life and death, his passionate feeling for his own locality, all aided his evasion of important characterisation and his failure to express the major social issues of his material. The theme of *Ivan* was the building of Dnieperstroi and his idea the interpretation of the initial step in change from peasant to proletarian psychology. But, with one exception, the characters did not reflect the struggle for reconstruction and lacked biographical interest. As a result, the theme shifted away from the original psychological problem, and became concentrated instead in the glorious sequences of the slow-moving Dnieper and the dream world of smoke and steel and concrete out of which the Dam was slowly rising.

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‘Characters’, says Dinamov, ‘disappeared from our cinema because the directors did not *know* the people. They thought the film must be based upon the mass but the film without a hero was only an experiment. We need actors with great passions. Without actors we can do nothing. We cannot base our cinema on typage.’

Ermler and Yutkevich’s *Counterplan* marked the beginning of a new period. Not only did it, for the first time, attempt to show the worker learning his job, but it also suggested that the professional actor might be an essential part of the cinema. It began to explore individual characterisation rather than continue with the methods of typage. It was the period not only of reconstruction but a period in which the individual was beginning to analyse his relations to the State. Consequently the workers in the cinema had to grasp fully this relationship before they could attempt characterisation. It is significant that Ermler studied two years at the Communist Academy before making *Counterplan*. Macharet’s *Men and Jobs* went a step further than *Counterplan*, synthesising the professional actor with the natural type, and even enlisted comedy to present the psychological dilemma of the workers adjusting themselves to the efficiency of American engineering methods.

Pudovkin, during this time, still pursued the typage theory and after making his first sound film, *Deserter*, over which he took two years, wrote:

‘After much experimental and theoretical work I am convinced that it is possible to get excellent



COUNTERPLAN (Ermel & Utkevitch)



DESERTER (Pudovkin)

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material for a picture from the ordinary man, taken straight from the street, who, never having acted before, is yet sensitive to the meaning of the experienced *régisseur*.

‘In my last two pictures, *A Simple Case* and *Deserter*, it is with just such people I have worked. My problem is always by what means I am going to get these people, who are real human material, to express the right emotions at the right moment. There are thousands of means, but their successful application depends on how exact the study of the people has been. The fundamental principle is always the same: the man (or the actor) must be placed in such a position that his reactions to the external stimulus (the question, order or unexpected sound signal), which I have calculated and determined, shall be more or less the expected one. To be able to create the right psychological atmosphere, it is essential for me to get into the closest contact with the people I’m working with. I try to meet them outside work on common ground and observe their natural ways, knowing that these observations will give me material for further work.’¹

At the findings of the January Conference, however, Pudovkin was criticised for the lifelessness of his characters. His absorption with montage had lead him away from the simple characterisation and simple psychology of *Mother*. *A Simple Case* created artificial people and lost touch with the philosophy of its period. *Deserter* had moments of human emotion, such as the weeping woman at the election of delegates,

¹ *Vide* ref. p. 174.

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but Pudovkin had retraced his steps into an out-of-date theme and you could have small interest in his hero.

Eisenstein, on the other hand, had become lost in academic exploration. He did not, it was said, understand this new period of synthesis. He separated thought from emotion. But from the text of his G.I.K. lectures, I should have said he understood the problem only too well but was experiencing the greatest difficulty in doing anything about it except theorise.

It is at this point that we find the unanimous acceptance of *Chapaev*, a film that disappointed the foreign intelligentsia because they expected technical fireworks and, receiving none, dismissed it as being dull. But this 'optimistic tragedy', as Dinamov called it, is very important. Though the theme was based on historical facts of the Civil War period, taken from a novel by Furmanov, Chapaev's own commissar, the characters and events were seen through modern eyes, from a Marxist point of view.

'*Chapaev*', says Eisenstein, 'is the answer to the very deep solving of Party problems in art.' '*Chapaev*', says Trauberg, 'is a hero but he is not above the heads of the audience. He is their brother. But in *October* the people were very high up.' '*Chapaev*', says Dovjenko, 'is tied up with the future of the cinema.' 'There is a distinct bridge between *Chapaev* and *Mother*', declares Yutkevich. 'In *Chapaev*', says Pudovkin, 'we see how a real class character is made.'

The fact is that *Chapaev* met the demands of its period. It gave the mass a hero whom they could understand. It gave them a man whose mind developed

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from comparative illiteracy to social and political consciousness during the course of a film. Had Pudovkin or Eisenstein taken this subject ten years ago, instead of *Mother* or *Potemkin*, they would both in their different ways have treated it as a heroic mass drama of the Civil War. As it was, the Vassilevs made an analysis of character and enlisted a professional actor to interpret the part. They forgot the earlier teachings of typage—of grotesque caricature for the capitalist villain—and introduced tenderness, love and humour as integral parts of the film. They answered Dinamov's plea that 'we need actors with great passions' and 'the voice of the hero must be the voice of the epoch, and the voice of the epoch must be the voice of the hero'. *Chapaev*, with its quiet, almost theatrical style, its simple technique devoid of montage or sound devices, brought back the human being, or, more correctly, introduced the human being to Soviet cinema. It made use of characterisation as some American and British films make use of characterisation. But there was this difference. The characters lived.

So, also, did the characters in *Kameradschaft*, a film not often mentioned when this discussion of acting arises. Despite Pabst's use of professional actors and studio-constructed sets, *Kameradschaft* falls into the widest reading of documentary. It carried an important socio-political theme. It was typical in its choice of individuals and incidents. It was unmistakably propagandist in aim, if not produced on a propagandist basis. The tragic effect of the mine disaster, in itself typical enough actual material for

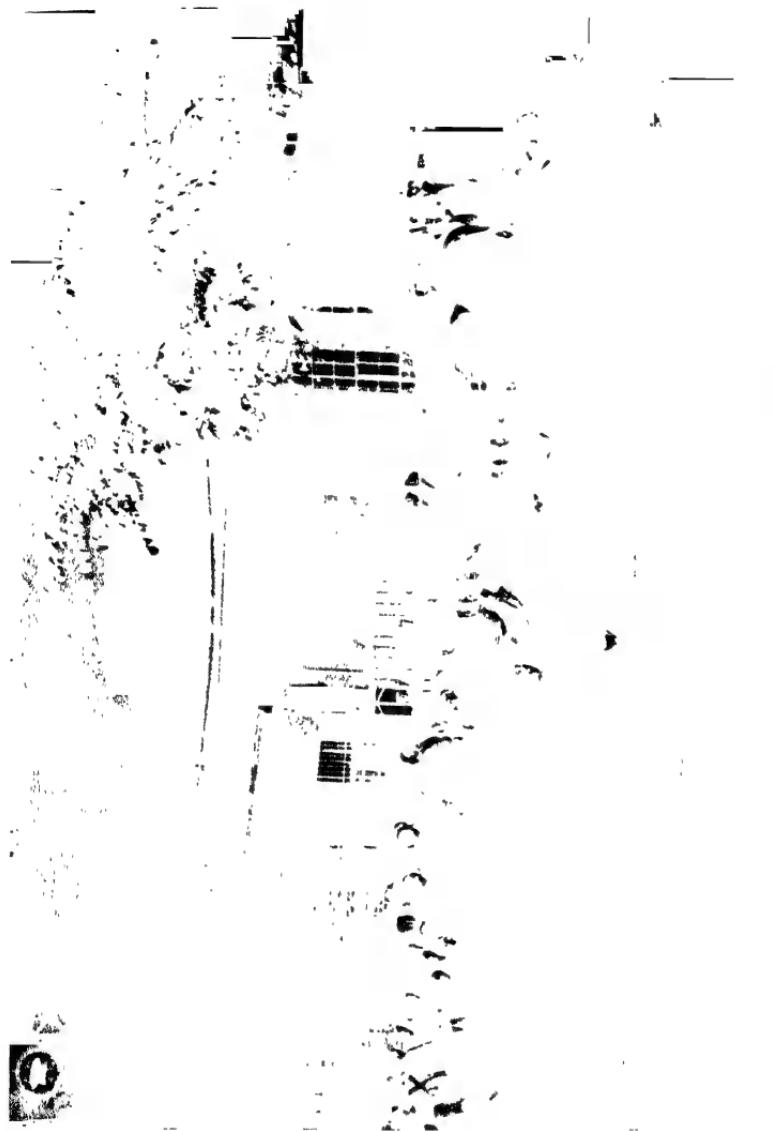
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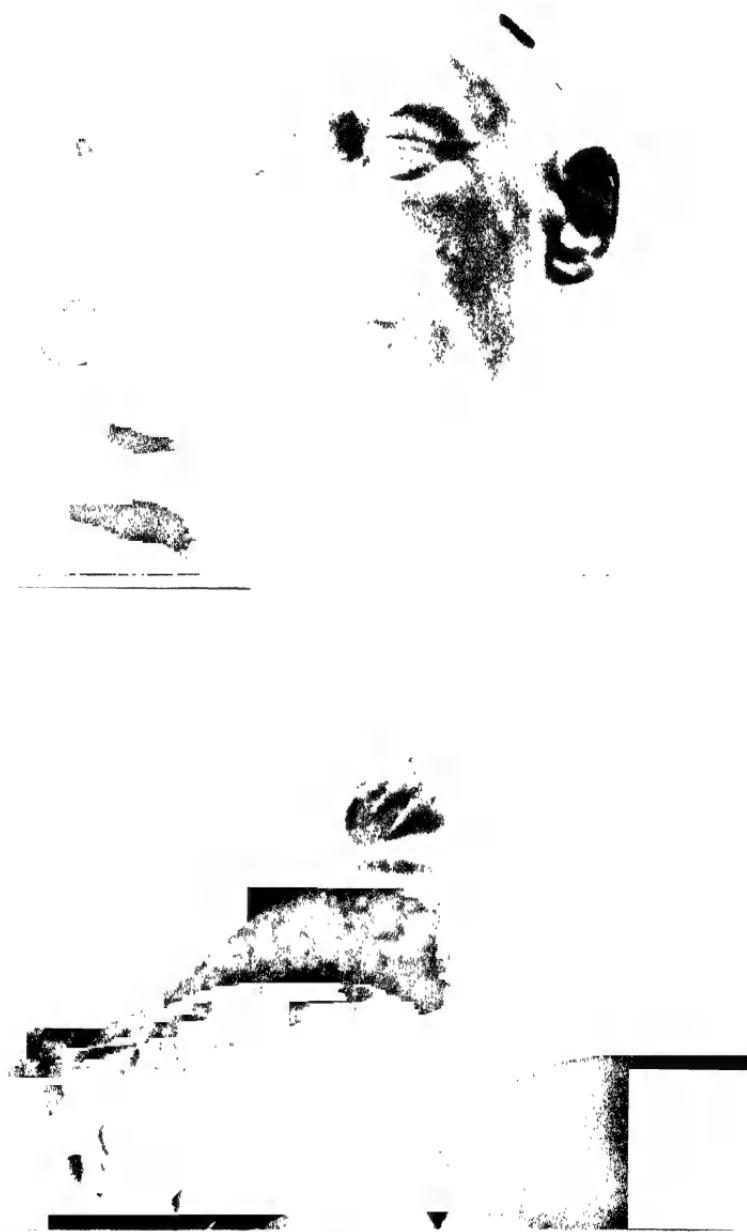
documentary, was intensified by linking it to the personal relationships of the characters—the old man and his nephew, the boy and his fiancée, the three German miners—but at the same time those relationships never became dominant. The internationalism of the theme came foremost throughout. I am greatly of the opinion that *Kameradschaft*, quite distinct from Pabst's other and less satisfactory work, pointed the way which the documentary of to-morrow may take. That is to imply a closer link to the story-film as we know it to-day but still remaining distinct in its approach to material and its emphasis on method. Perhaps the distinction may best be defined by a comparison between such an American story-film, with an industrial background, as *Black Fury*, a vehicle for Paul Muni, and Pabst's *Kameradschaft*. The difference is obvious.

All this is, I think, important in its relation to documentary to-day. To a great extent, from Flaherty to Grierson, documentary has pursued the line of typage and not very skilfully at that. It has allowed its emotions to arise from the excitement of the event, or the drama of its theme, rather than from the emotions of the human beings within the picture. We have made this point earlier and I make it again without apology, because the actor, the natural type and the element of acting are going to be important problems in the immediate future of documentary.

If significant propagandist motives are to be served, it is clearly not the slightest use making films which will appeal only to a limited section of the public. But

KAMFERANDSCHAFT (Pabst)





THE MINE (Holmes)

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this has been one of the principal faults of the documentalists. If documentary is going to be significant, we must make films which will move the people and not just amuse our fellow-directors. If cinema is a branch of art at all, then it is the most vulgar branch because it is the most popular. And if the masses are interested in seeing individuals and following their emotions on the screen, then documentary must embrace individuals.

At the same time, there is no reason why we should follow in the footsteps of the story-film. If we have individuals, let them be typical and let them be real. Documentary can have no use for the synthetic and fabulous caricatures that populate the ordinary story-film. There are hundreds of people in our everyday life that have never appeared on the screen. But before we can bring them into cinema, we must be prepared to go out and understand them. Our need is for characters who will be simply understood. They must be of the audience. We must go into the streets and homes and factories to meet them. The whole evil of the American star-system, which in its way is a kind of typage, is that it treats with types of a false economic and social superiority. The star, for political and social reasons already explained, is nearly always an inaccessible creature living on a scale unobtainable by members of the audience. Only occasionally is he or she allowed to descend to the level of the audience, and when this happens they are nearly always popular, as in the case of Janet Gaynor. But for the most part the typage of the star-system is an

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unusual typage—a gallery of smart-alecs, whores, crooks and idealised young men. It is in the power of documentary to put real men and women on the screen. The problem lies in how it can be done.

Despite the abrupt reactions of the Soviets to typage, I feel that it is still probably the most satisfactory approach to human beings in documentary. But so far we have made practically no experiment. None of us in British documentary can say that we know how to work with actors; nor can we pretend that we have learnt how to create the actor out of natural material. That was well seen in Elton's *Housing Problems*. Good types, it is true, do not require to act. 'My actors', says Pudovkin, 'are everywhere—in the streets and on the farms. They are not artists, they are physically and psychologically right.' Typage, in fact, represents the least artificial organisation of reality, whereas the professional actor, as we have seen in our earlier analysis, represents the greatest.

But there arises this trouble. If we are going to use natural people and characterise them as individuals in our films, how are we going to persuade them to assume this or that expression, or feel this or that emotion according to our requirements? Richard Griffith, in an eloquent plea for the consideration of acting as part of the cinema plan, makes the point that no matter how skilful the montage, the trained actor is still more flexible than the natural type. He can produce expressions of emotion required by the director for editing more faithfully than unrehearsed raw

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material.¹ This, I agree, is probably true of the story-film to-day, but I doubt if it applies to documentary.

Natural actors who are selected for documentary are typical of their class, mentality and occupation. You do not expect of them more than their natural behaviour. It would be as absurd to expect, say, a shipyard riveter to play the role of a bank clerk as it would be to expect a bus-driver to operate a movie camera, because that would be asking the riveter to possess a specially trained faculty outside his daily job. If you cannot find a bank clerk physically and psychologically suited to the character you wish to represent, then obviously you must employ a trained actor. But, at the same time, it would suggest that there is something seriously wrong with your conception.

Assuming that the documentary director has a mastery of his technique, assuming that he has an intimate understanding of the characters he wishes to express on the screen, he would be unwise to dispense with the valuable spontaneity that comes from natural acting, a spontaneity which can never be obtained from rehearsed professional material. You will recall, in this connection, Flaherty's remark that children and animals are the finest of all film material because they are spontaneous in their actions; and his pre-occupation with peasants, hunters and craftsmen because purpose has made their simple movements beautiful and expressive.

It would appear, I think, that it lies with the director to discover the natural acting ability of his

¹ 'The Function of the Actor', *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. III, no. 3.

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characters according to their job and background, and to place himself in their position so that he can understand their feelings and their movements. He must be continually aware that, for all its powers of penetration, the camera records only the surface of what it photographs and that it is the inner meaning, the meaning below the surface, which really matters.

Your documentalist must always think from his actor's point of view. Like a sculptor or a draughtsman, he must think from the inside outwards. He must feel with his actor, understand the motives behind his actions and expressions and, by skill of camera movement and position, by skill of putting shot against shot, angle against angle, interpret the mind of his natural actor from a psychological attitude. Flaherty is most skilful at this interpretation. Notice in *Industrial Britain* his grasp of the potter's job, his remarkable anticipation of the craftsman's hands as they mould the clay, his movement of camera always *just in front* of the movement of his actor. Perhaps the most perfect examples of his observation are the building of the igloo in *Nanook* and the patching of the curragh in *Man of Aran*. Such anticipatory movement of the camera is born, I suggest, only of long experience and of careful analysis and, most important of all, of a complete understanding of human material.

If this understanding and interpretation of the human being in documentary is difficult in Russia, it is ten times more difficult in Britain, where all the vices of class-consciousness and the self-conceit of the bourgeois mind conspire to thwart a natural

THE FUNCTION OF THE DIRECTOR

approach. There is a barrier between the documentalist and his acting material which is hard to break down. Except in rare cases, your documentalist is fighting his human material, no matter how desirous of co-operation the latter may be. This is probably the reason why most of our documentalists have avoided the human being, have been content to escape into surface estimates of individuals, and have concentrated their efforts on depicting inanimate organisations and impersonal aspects of human fulfilments. They have been afraid to tell their natural actors to act. This, I believe, is being overcome. But not without loss of certain cinematic quality, as in *Housing Problems*.

In the British school it is curious to note how the women directors have been more successful than the men in handling people. Evelyn Spice, in *Weather Forecast* and her farm films, and Marion Grierson, have both, I suggest, handled their characters with greater sympathy than is found in other documentaries of the Grierson group. The reason may lie in their lack of self-consciousness and their apparent disinterest in style. Spice shoots her material almost carelessly, with little or no attention to fancy tricks of camera set-up. But what she loses in style she more than gains in human values. More probably, the success of these two directors is explained by the fact that they came to documentary from journalism. Interviewing and reporting were familiar jobs and they carried this valuable experience into cinema.

There is, of course, one main danger to the pursuit of typage methods, that same danger which has

DOCUMENTARY IN THE MAKING

caused reaction in the Russian school. Taken to extreme lengths, typage tends to become unnatural or, if you prefer it, to become too naturalistic. Unless the type actor is in himself interesting, not only as an individual but as typical of a class section, typage becomes dull and unemotional. This is true, I find, more of the literary *reportage* school, with its increasing tendency towards personal interviews, than of the impressionists. Plain statements about a man and his job are likely to prove uninteresting unless such statements are related to sociological fulfilments.

But whichever way we approach the position of the actor, natural or professional, in documentary we are met with the same problem—that the actor's relation to the film is conditioned by the real individual's relation to the world in which he lives. Only an analysis of social and economic relationships bound up with the subject of the film will give the clue to the manner of characterisation, which makes it imperative for your documentary director and producer to possess well-developed powers of social analysis.

(b) **Background.** Documentary is supposed to find a great deal of beauty in its preference for the natural setting, whether industrial, rural, urban or at the less civilised ends of the earth. But the beauty is the beauty of reality and not the beauty of aesthetic appeal. Documentary may prefer the unarranged scene and the unrehearsed action but this does not, I think, rule out the licence of arrangement if a greater emotional effect can thereby be gained. There can be no fixed ruling on this matter and it is foolish to attempt to

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make hard and fast definitions. Naturalism in itself is not reality, nor is documentary characterised wholly by its preference for natural material. The actual scene and the actual individual have virtues not possessed by artificially created imitations. But this does not dictate the necessity to avoid either the studio or the professional actor, if their use can achieve a better projection of the subject. Documentary in the past has, it is true, been mainly concerned with the creative interpretation of actuality but this is not to say that this will be the method of the immediate future.

As far as exterior work is concerned, there can be no argument about real or artificial setting. The actual scene is an absolute necessity to the documentalist, is in fact inherent in his whole conception of cinema. The creation lies not in the arrangement of the setting but in the interpretation of it. The changes of atmosphere, the characteristics of the place, the position of sun and shadows, these must be observed and selected according to the requirements of the scene. They cannot be arranged or rehearsed. They can only be observed. They must be taken as they are found, although certain detail, such as the movement of objects, can be altered if the screen result will be more effective. Here, again, the film *Kameradschaft* is of interest.

As is well known, all the interior scenes of the pit were reconstructed in the studio with remarkable skill by the architect Ernö Metzner. But not until after a careful observation had been made of actual locations. Not only did Metzner and Pabst study countless photographs of wreckage attending pit ex-

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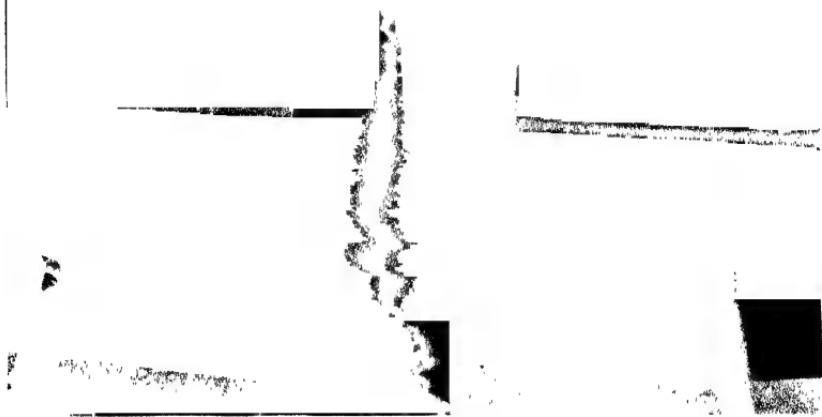
plosions, similar to that which was the main event of their film, but they actually had transported to the studio portions of machinery and suchlike from which to construct the sets. On the other hand, all the scenes at the pithead were taken on an actual location, Pabst employing natural types for all but his principal characters and making full use of the natural characteristics and atmosphere of the place.

Take, alternatively, a documentary like Elton's *Aero-Engine*, with its foundries and stamp-shops, machine-shops and assembling-sheds. These could not possibly have been fabricated in the studio nor, had they been transported to more accessible surroundings, would they have produced better effect.

Thus, we must obviously conclude that the use of studio or the use of the actual scene is a matter of convenience rather than of theory, that is without considering the question of cost. But the studio must, I feel, only be resorted to after a full examination of the actual scene has resulted in a decision that the latter would be unwise to use. Studio reconstruction must, in all but the rarest cases, be the last and not the first consideration.

(iv) Photography

As far as the general obtaining of actual material for documentary purpose is concerned, there is one major point to be emphasised at outset. That is the danger of false effect which often results from the loveliness inherent in cine-photography. The perfection of modern photographic materials, the sensitivity and



AERO-ENGINE (Elton)



PESCADOS (Strand)

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latitude of film stock, the colour correction obtainable through the use of filters, the precision of up-to-date cameras and the efficient processing by some laboratories are such that they sometimes achieve a falsified rendering of actual material.

Photographic excellence in documentary must never be permitted to become a virtue in itself. Photography, like sound and editing, is only a contributory element to the technique required for an adequate expression of the subject. Too often, chiefly through lack of understanding between director and photographer, the photographic effect becomes dominant over subject. So long have photographers been trained by studio-routine to produce the best looking results that they distort altogether those characteristics and atmospheric qualities which are so essential to documentary. Good photography in documentary cannot be judged by the same standards as those applicable to the studio-made picture. Their respective aims are quite different. In documentary, a slum must be a slum, with all its hideous filth and wilful ugliness. In the story-picture, a slum is as often as not a cobweb alley, dirty and dilapidated, perhaps, but photographed in a charming, sentimental manner so as to fulfil the romantic aim of the amusement cinema. Compare, for example, *Seventh Heaven* with *Housing Problems*.

Beauty is one of the greatest dangers to documentary. Beauty of individual shots is not only insufficient but frequently harmful to the significant expression of content. Beauty of purely natural things, of sunlight and flowers, of the ceiling of the sky, is unimportant

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unless related to purpose and theme. Beauty of symphonic and rhythmic movement is, as we have seen, nothing in itself. What is important is beauty of idea, fact and achievement, none of which have anything to do with the actual filming of individual shots.

On many occasions I have seen sequences in a documentary which have been poorly photographed but which have been the most successful part of the film. Often I have seen gloriously photographed material which has been depressingly dull in the final film. On the other hand, I do not for a moment suggest that the pretentious attitude which exists in some quarters, that bad photography by its very badness becomes a virtue, is to be upheld. I mean, rather, that photography must be undertaken in all weathers at all times *according to the nature of the subject* and that the test of the photography lies in its creation of atmosphere and interpretation of action for the most effective interpretation of the theme.

Documentary shooting is most generally shooting on sight, shooting without time for careful lighting or perfect weather conditions, shooting in all manner of circumstances which the studio cameraman would consider impossible. Fog, rain, mist, dust and half-light are all normal conditions for documentary photography; are, in fact, often the exact conditions under which the director requires his material to be obtained. Such conditions are what the ex-studio photographer would call suitable for 'effect stuff', but when atmosphere plays such an important part as it does in documentary, these conditions are no longer

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those of 'effect' but perfectly normal. That is the attitude which the cameraman must possess and, if he has previously been nursed in studio conditions, it will be very difficult for him to understand documentary requirements.

Much the same may be said of ordinary straightforward exterior shooting. Whereas your studio-trained photographer will usually insist on sun, your documentary cameraman must, like the news-reel man, be prepared to shoot in any light. If his conscience hurts him, his consolation lies in the satisfaction of knowing that the director is responsible for the effect achieved and must know what effect he desires. Conditions of shooting are an inherent part of the subject being filmed and the documentary director will shoot with, or without, sun only to achieve the result he requires. This does not imply, however, that a harvest sequence shot in poor light can, by virtue of its drabness, be lovely in effect unless drabness was the object in view. This, again, is yet another point in favour of freedom of footage and latitute of time in documentary production.

The same observations are true of interior work, where artificial lighting is almost always a necessity. Here the danger lies in over-lighting for effect, which may be what is known as 'artistic' but is untrue to the actual location. This is a danger which arises particularly in all forms of industrial work. Under the play of artificial light, whether incandescent or arc, machinery assumes a surface beauty quite apart from its functional value and a drop-stamp shop may

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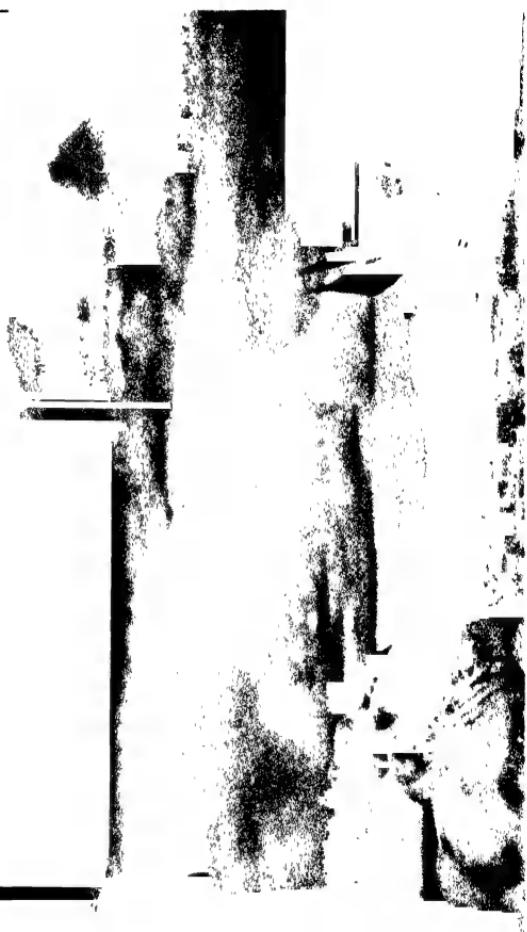
look like a cathedral. To photograph machinery so that its movements and shapes are visually exciting on the screen is not the same thing as photographing machinery in relation to its conditions of work and its human fulfilments. The manufacture of a machine-gun can be made cinematically beautiful by photography and cutting but no documentary purpose is thereby achieved. Not until the instrument's function is related to the men who make it, not until its use is related to its reasons for manufacture, does the important issue arise. The danger attending good photography (in the studio sense) is at once plain.

Artificial lighting, moreover, in an industrial scene tends to create unreal atmosphere unless skilfully manipulated. It must be remembered that there is seldom time to arrange or rehearse material as in the studio, and that much of the action must be shot on speculation. The man behind the camera catches this, that or the other fragment of movement, facial expression or play of light as quickly as his skill of movement and camera experience will permit. This applies especially to work in such locations as foundries, rolling-mills, coal mines, shipyards, and all general industrial interiors where the action continues at its normal pace of routine, oblivious of the presence of a film unit.

It is, I maintain, always the job of a director to fit his filming to suit the manufacture in hand and not, as is so often the case, to 'stage' a process to meet film requirements. This calls for quick thinking and rapid working, factors which can result only from previous



SHIPYARD (Rotha)



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observation on the part of the director and smooth co-operation between the whole unit of cameraman, electricians and director.

The placing and movement of the camera before its material is, of course, one of the major tasks of the director and should never be dictated by anything other than subject meaning. The rhetoric of a camera placed low, the god-like vision of a camera set high, these are weapons with which the director fights to put across his theme. Camera angle and camera movement, just as sound and cutting, must always be conditioned by subject and meaning and can never, on any account, play an important part in themselves, a point not often appreciated by learning directors. Intelligent camera placing and sensitive camera movement can and do give a full expression to material which would otherwise be dead but, in the final reckoning, technique must always come second to content.

Beyond this, there is little to be said about actual filming. The whole procedure is purely a matter of experiment and experience, tempered with instinct and, occasionally, a certain abandoned disregard of all accepted methods. It is the latter element that lifts the work of a director from being merely competent to being something exciting and exceptional. The placing of the object within the frame, the speed of a panning movement, the interpolation of slow-motion to draw special emphasis, the distribution of weight in foreground and background, the intimacy of the great close-up and the importance of getting right into your

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material and letting it surround you, these are all matters which cannot be discussed here but must arise in their rightful place—the private theatre when the material is on the screen. At best, I can refer back to the passages dealing with the fundamental differences that exist between using the camera creatively or reproductively (see pages 75-77); and from this suggest that the analysis of subject-matter into separate shots, and the ultimate synthesis of these shots in the cutting-room in relation to sound, constitute the first exercise to be learned by the documentalist.

It would be unfair to leave the subject of photography and its part in documentary technique without reference, probably for the first time, to the debt that the documentalist, especially in Britain, owes to the cameramen who have worked in this branch of cinema. Frequently it is stated that the documentalist should always undertake his own camerawork, as do Flaherty and Wright. But, while fully agreeing that your director should be able to handle a camera if required, the employment of a separate cameraman is, I think, a necessary factor in most documentary production. Camera set-up and movement are, of course, matters upon which the director must always have final say, because both play such a vital part in the expression of content on the screen. But the experience of a cameraman on problems of difficult exposure, as well as the fact that often two or more cameras are required on one scene, generally makes advisable the presence of a cameraman as distinct from a director. At

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the same time, documentary is so much the product of director and producer that the work of the photographer is often overlooked, despite the fact that, from the point of view of popular acceptance, it is the quality of the photography which greatly assists the expression of the subject.

I do not think, for example, that sufficient credit has been attributed to those photographers who, for one reason or another, have become attached to the British documentary school. Some of them have had many years' experience in the commercial studios, others have specialised in publicity films and in the field of so-called 'interest' pictures, some have learnt their job with the news-reel outfits. None of them really grasped the purpose and distinctions of documentary before they worked with progressive documentary directors, but, on the other hand, they have on their side done much to advise and guide the experimental documentalist.

They fall roughly into three groups. Those of the older generation, the ex-studio or news-reel men; a younger generation who have specialised in exterior work of all kinds; and a still younger group of assistants and others who are training themselves in this new field. Of the first, mention must be made by name of George Pocknall, George Noble, James Rogers and Jack Rose. These four experienced and reliable photographers have, each in their own way, done a great deal to raise documentary photography to its present high position. Their adaptability to the strained conditions of documentary working (very different

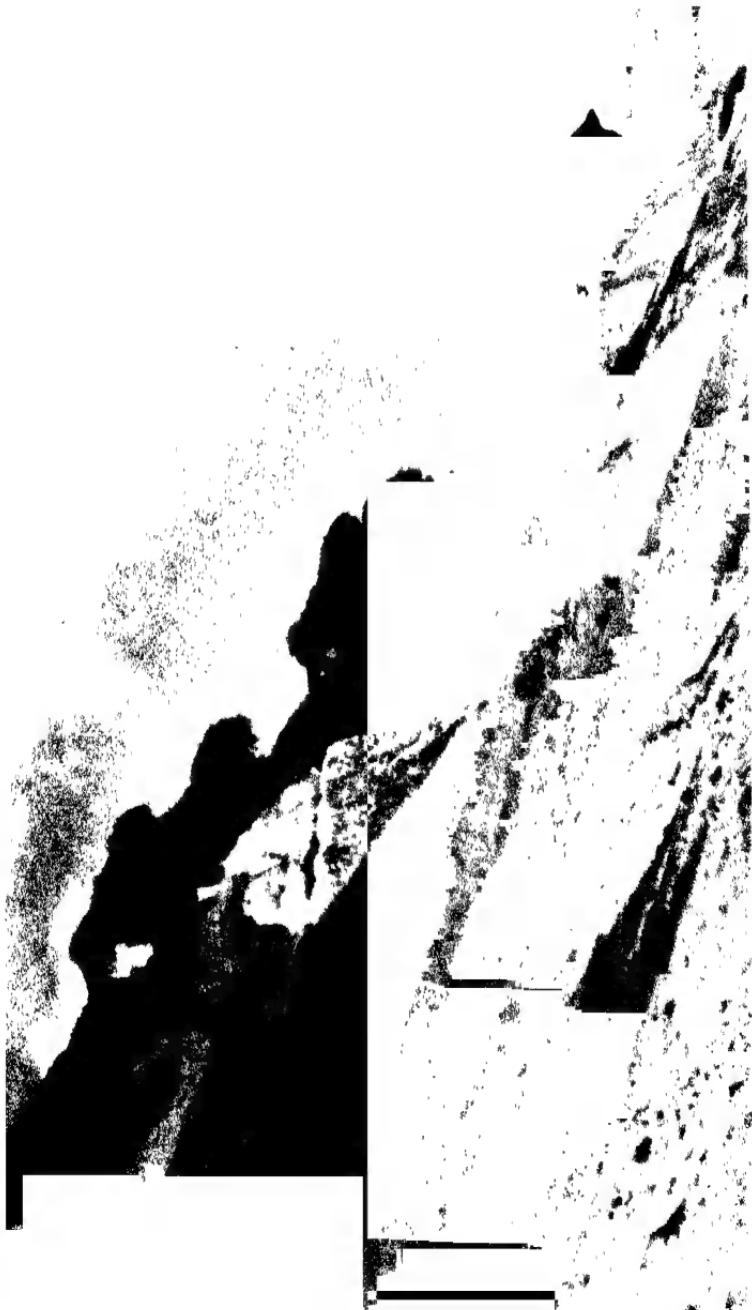
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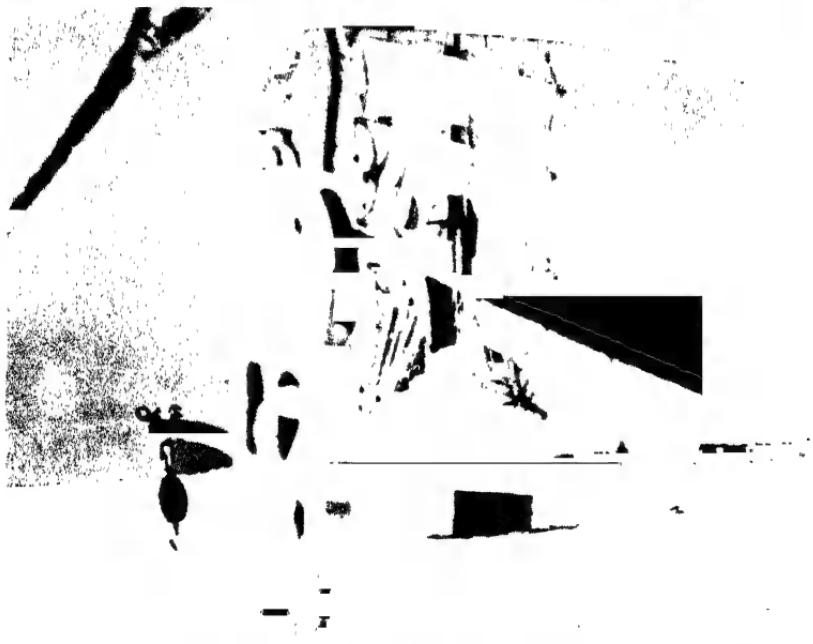
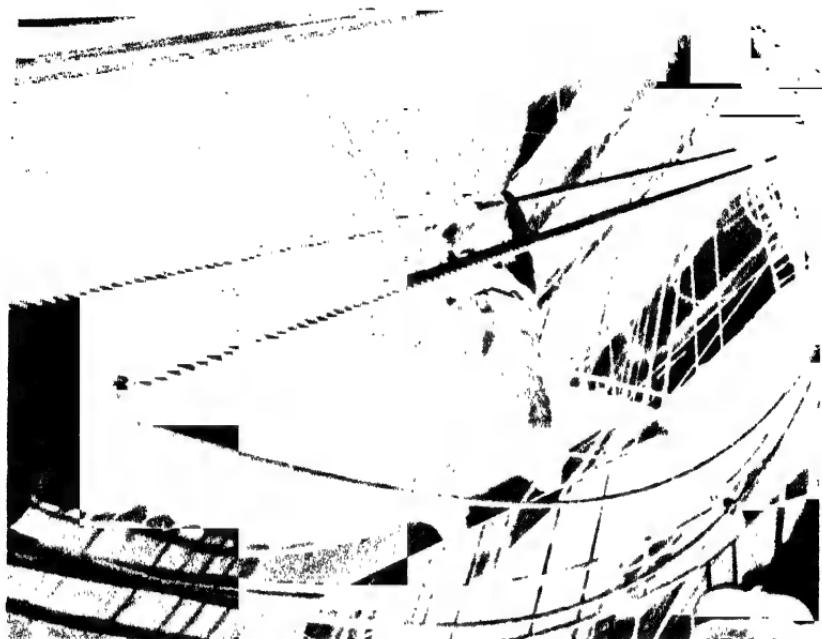
from the routine of the studio), their sometimes brilliant experiments with filterwork, artificial lighting and camera equipment, together with their general anxiety to achieve precisely the often difficult requirements of the documentary director (sometimes hesitant and unsure of himself), deserve, in my opinion, full admiration. To their skill of photography goes not a little of the credit for the reputation acquired by such documentaries as *The Voice of the World*, *The Face of Britain*, *Weather Forecast*, *B.B.C: The Voice of Britain*, *Aero-Engine* and *Shipyard*.

Of the second group, outstanding for their keenness and quickness to grasp the essentials of documentary work, are Frank Bundy, J. D. Davidson and Frank Goodliffe, the former especially for his excellent work in Holmes's *The Mine*. Each of these cameramen has, in his own way, contributed to the building up of the British documentary school, their individual efforts being best assessed by reference to the appendix at the end of this book.

Abroad, there does not seem to be quite such an interesting array of talent. Nearly all the Soviet photographers are doing better work than the quality of their imported prints would indicate. In France, Boris Kauffmann's work with Lods demands notice and Fernhout has 'turned' some good material with Ivens; but the Continentalists, as a whole, appear to favour the combination of director-photographer as with Storck and Basse.

THIS WAS ENGLAND (Mary Field)





WIND AND WATER (Curry)

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(v) Editing

It is not my intention here to discourse at length on the principles and perplexities of the cutting-bench. Excellent technical research has already been undertaken in these matters and the results published by Arnheim and others,¹ and no purpose can be usefully served by again covering the ground. On the other hand, one or two general observations on cutting as associated with documentary cannot be avoided if this brief survey of production is to be complete.

In dealing with the structure of the film strip, the elements of movement and symphonic form, acting, natural material and photography, we have so far been primarily concerned with the raw materials of film. Sufficient has been said regarding the film strip for us to realise that not until it comes to the cutting-bench for arrangement and selection does the raw material begin to take shape and life. Here, by the simple procedure of placing shot against shot, by variation in length of strips, we can create rhythms and tempos, build climaxes and prepare diminuendos. Details of close-up and the telephoto lens may be brought together with panoramic views of god-like remoteness. Atmosphere may be created by the introduction of images. Drama may be built by the creation of tension. Action may be contrived around energies. Shot may be piled upon shot for emotional effect. Dissolve

¹ *Film*, Rudolf Arnheim (Faber), 1933, *Film Technique*, Pudovkin (Newnes), 1934, *A Grammar of the Film*, Spottiswoode (Faber), 1935 and *The Film Till Now* (Cape), 1930, all contain exhaustive enquiry into editing methods.

DOCUMENTARY IN THE MAKING

may give way to dissolve in the moulding of quiet contemplation. But, in the sum, no academic rule-of-thumb can be laid down for editing. No metric basis of mathematically calculated shot-lengths can exist because cutting is governed by context and action.

Not until you reach the cutting-bench do you discover the mistakes of your shooting. You may, on the one hand, have a preponderance of close-ups and a lack of establishing long-shots or, if your weakness lies elsewhere, a surfeit of swift pan shots in a sequence where you wish to add calm to calm. Not until you come to cut do you realise the importance of correct analysis during camerawork and the essential need for preliminary observation. For unless your material has been shot from properly interrelated angles, unless the action has been understood 'from the inside', you cannot hope to 'bring it alive'. No amount of cutting, short or otherwise, will give movement to shots in which movement does not already exist. No skill of cross-reference will add poetic imagery to your sequence if you have been unaware of your images during shooting. Your film is given life on the cutting-bench but you cannot create life unless the necessary raw stuff is to hand. Cutting is not confined to the cutting-room alone. Cutting must be present all through the stages of production—script, photography and approach to natural material—finally to take concrete form as the sound is added.

In modern film, it is impossible to consider picture cutting separately from sound. As will be seen in the next section, sound and picture are so closely inter-

THE FUNCTION OF THE DIRECTOR

related that the cutting of one is wholly dependent on the cutting of the other. True, in much documentary to-day, the mute is edited before the sound band is composed but this does not imply that the mute is unalterable. The wise cutter will edit his picture only in rough form before he creates his sound; and even during this first assembly, as during the script and shooting, the sound is kept closely in mind. Alternatively, Cavalcanti has made some experiments in composing first his sound and then cutting his picture to it. *Pett and Pott*, *Coal Face* and the synchronised version of *Windmill in Barbados* were made in this way. We cannot give preference to either method: it depends upon a director's conception and, not least, upon the circumstances of production. But we can say this of sound, that its addition has revolutionised the continuity of picture cutting. Sound and speech make possible methods of continuity unknown in silent films. They have quickened the whole pace of a film's progress. Sound and picture working together permit more than one idea to be expressed at the same time. Imagistic and atmospheric sound allow quite new flights of imagination to govern the cutting of picture, as will be seen in our later section dealing with sound technique.

Since earlier analysis has been published, there is only one aspect of editing in which marked development has taken place; that is the use of the dissolve and superimposition. The growing perfection of optical-printing has made possible the overlapping of shots for considerable footage, a device that has greatly assisted

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the creation of atmosphere and has furthered the idea of overlapping movement of action from one shot into the next. *The Song of Ceylon* contained many examples of this latter method. The use of combined dissolves and superimposition to form complete sequences pursues in picture the same motive of dual expression as has been experimented with in sound. Two ideas, each associated notionally, may be developed simultaneously, one foreground and the other background, thereby presenting a relationship of context to the audience in a way which could not otherwise be effected. Examples along these lines, as contained in *The Song of Ceylon* and *Shipyard*, demonstrate that this use of superimposition is quite different from the more common symbolic uses found in such films as *Enthusiasm* or *The General Line*. But however much I appreciate the possibilities of the optical-printer for most kinds of dissolve and superimposition, I equally deplore its use for the wipe-dissolve, which is nothing more nor less than an easy way out of continuity difficulties.

Taking into consideration the differences brought about by sound and the developments in superimposition, the cutting of mute film still remains based on the principles laid down with such clarity by the Russians over the last ten years. Analysis of film strip and analysis of context continue to be the fundamental factors of editing. The aim of cutting is still to stir the emotions of the audience so that it will be receptive of context without the cutting itself becoming prominent; except, that is, to the observant technician who is interested in such things.

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B. Sound

Although it is nearly seven years since the marriage between sound and sight marked the second great development in cinema, there has really been little progress made in the uses to which this powerful blending of the dual methods of appeal has been put. The increased scope of the film made possible by the addition of sound has been described at length by theorists in almost every country. The entirely new world opened up by the potentialities of synchronised voice and fabricated sound has been indicated times without number. But looking round last year's parade of cinema, the best that America and Europe can do, we find little that is in advance of product five or six years back except in an increased perfection of mechanical reproduction.

There have been, it is true, occasional flashes in the popular amusement films to signify that sound has been thought about. Now and again, in the course of some quite commonplace picture, there has occurred a situation where, consciously or unconsciously, sound has been used for something more than just reproductive effect. Its power of drama has been recognised. Much discussion was provoked, you will recall, by Hitchcock's emphasis on the word 'knife' in *Blackmail*. Mamoulian has employed the soliloquy as an expression of conscience. Several gangster melodramas made use of obvious physical sound to pile sensation upon sensation. *The Beast of the City* was a case in point. Narratage came in with a flourish and fell with a flop.

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Nugent's *Three Cornered Moon* made play with the disembodied voice over the unemployment scenes. Thiele, Lubitsch and Clair developed the chorus but developed it for comedy. Pabst used speech and sound to give point to his international struggle in *Kameradschaft*. The student will remember many other such instances, as in Granovsky's *Song of Life* and Vertov's *Enthusiasm*. At the same time he will admit that such experiments have been the exception and that the story-film has, on the whole, failed to make more interesting use of sound than for the mere reproduction of written dialogue and the sound of objects as performed in front of the camera and microphone.

It took documentary roughly five years to get sound at all and nearly seven before it possessed sound in a form with which experiment was possible. Recording facilities were available, of course, before that date. Quite a few documentaries were fitted out with musical accompaniments (sometimes specially written), nearly all had spoken commentaries attached and the more *élite* were permitted the use of 'sounds off'. *Tabu* had an arrangement of music by Riesenfeld; *World Melody* by Wolfgang Zeller; *Contact* by Raybould; while the *Industrial Britain* series of the E.M.B. were decked out with popular accompaniments and informative commentaries by the firm which undertook their distribution. Elton's *Voice of the World* was, I think, the first documentary, at any rate in Britain, which used sound at all imaginatively. That was in 1933.

The whole problem was, and still is, that although the actual mechanical facilities for recording sound

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with picture were, in some cases, available, there was neither the time nor the economic means for experiment. Most documentalists had their ideas about using sound, as was apparent from the many articles published on the subject, mostly based on the theories talked about by Cavalcanti. They realised all too clearly that the power of the microphone lay in something more intelligent than merely reproducing the spoken words of people and the natural sound of objects in synchronisation. They had, we must confess, some difficulty and argument with those charming reactionary persons who, until this day, still believe that when you see an object on the screen you should also hear its sound, despite the fact that the addition of its sound serves merely to repeat the object. They appreciated and took into consideration an audience's mentality, knowing that foreknowledge permits the spectator to accept the slamming of a door or the report of a pistol, just as it does the fact that the sky is often blue and the grass green. Only when special significance is attached to such obvious sounds, they argued, need use be made of them.

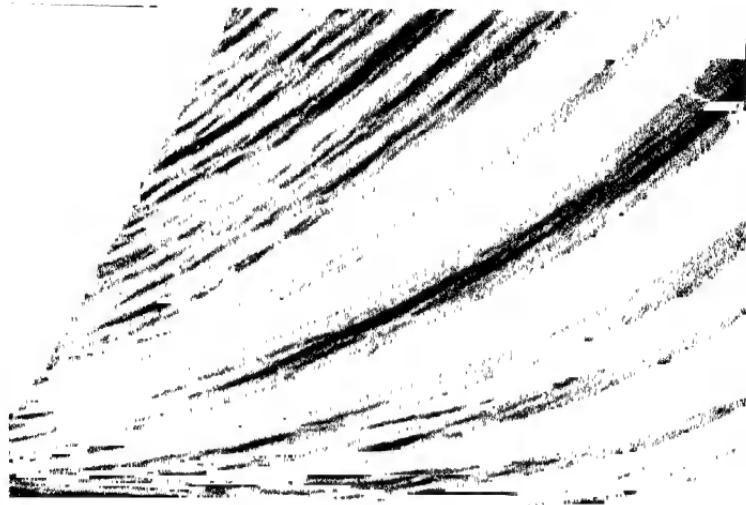
As with our visual approach to actuality, maintained the documentalists, so in sound mere plain description is insufficient. We dramatise natural things and real people, arrange them to express a certain purpose, therefore we must also dramatise sound and exploit it to amplify our visual method. In the same way that we learnt how to create on the cutting-bench, to use the god-like vision of the camera to express in terms of relation and conflict, to dissolve our images

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one into another, to create tension and suspense by the juxtaposition of shot against shot, so also must we employ the cutting-bench and the re-recording panel to give meaning and dramatic power to our sounds. Not only this, but we can get around the place with our microphone. We can pick up this, that or the other series of sounds and put them, not necessarily against their rightful visual counterparts, but maybe alongside other visual scenes, by which process we shall open up new fields for association and cross-reference. Even more interesting, we can fabricate sounds, mix one with another to produce something which has not been heard before. We can detach sounds from their origins and use them as symbols, and so on.

To repeat, the problem lay not in the collection of the raw material or in the actual job of manufacturing and recording sound, but in being permitted to use the microphone creatively and not reproduc-tively. In all but a few cases, the studio story-picture had remained glued to the narrow and safe groove of direct synchronisation. Documentary demanded flexibility and post-synchronisation. To achieve this, it was essential that there must be an intimate connection between the documentalist and his apparatus. Just as the documentalist had turned upside down the notions and conventions of the studio cameraman, had on occasions seized the very camera out of his hands, had built up a whole new standard of photography to meet new purposes, so must he upset the orthodox methods of studio recording, get to the mixing panel himself, and create with his sound in the same way that he

SO THIS IS LONDON (Marion Grierson)





KOMSOMOL (Ivens)

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learnt to create with his picture. It was no question of accompaniment, although for most uses the post-synchronisation of sound to picture proved the more convenient. It was a question of sound springing from the same dominant mind as the picture, of the two producing an inseparable unity of which one half would be useless without the other.

Just how documentary has contrived, and is still contriving, to get down to this relationship with sound is not our immediate concern. Rather are we interested in the results of this placing of sound on an experimental basis. Some of the difficulties are well summed up by the G.P.O. Film Unit's struggle to get sound equipment, others are not available for discussion.¹ The point is that, in Britain, and apparently in the U.S.S.R., documentary has in rather less than two years made use of the sound medium to an extent unthought of in the ordinary story-film. In some half-dozen sound films, produced under severe economic conditions, documentary has begun to show what lies ahead of cinema if its resources are used intelligently and to specific purpose. Our aim here, then, is to see what lines these experiments have taken and to speculate generally on the further uses of sound to increase the influence of the documentary film.

(i) Raw Materials

The various kinds of sound—music, speech, natural sound and the rest—and the collecting of same by

¹ 'The G.P.O. Gets Sound', John Grierson, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. II, no. 4.

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means of either studio recording or excursions with a mobile sound-truck may all be grouped under a general heading of raw materials. They do not represent the creative use of sound, which is accomplished at a later stage on the cutting-bench and the re-recording panel, but rather the first gathering of material from which the eventual sound band will be created for cementing with the visual (mute) strip.

In the same way that the collection of the visuals is conditioned by factors arising out of production circumstances, so also is the collection of sound. Some of it may be lengths of track recorded in direct synchronisation with the picture, some may be shot wildtrack (from which endless loops of constant sound and edited tracks may be made for re-recording), some may be fabricated. Use of method depends wholly upon the aim in view, accessibility and economic conditions. For convenience of discussion, however, we may divide the raw materials into three groups—synchronised and non-synchronised sound and speech and music—remembering at the same time that these groups are elastic and that actual production conditions are the final determining factor.

(a) *Synchronised Sound and Speech.* Although for the most part it is found convenient to use post-synchronisation methods in documentary, that is to say the addition of sound and speech after the visuals have been taken and edited, there are occasions when direct synchronisation of picture with sound are essential. These may take place either on the actual location or, if absolutely necessary, in the studio.

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Synchronised sound and speech are, by their very nature, glued to their visual counterpart. Their job, therefore, is the simple one of explanation and guidance. There is nothing particularly imaginative in their use, unless special dialogue is required. Even then, the objective is purely literary. Sounds of the more obvious kind, such as a pile-driver, a pneumatic riveter, hammering or footsteps, require exact synchronisation with their visual origins, quite apart from their use for more imaginative purposes. Earlier we have deplored the point of view that demands to hear the sound of every object seen on the screen, but we deplore this only when it is carried, on reasons of principle, to the lengths of monotony or absurdity. There is no doubt that if the audience sees a hammer hit a metal plate on the screen, then the sound must accompany the action in synchronisation, unless there is some significant purpose to be served by suppressing the sound. But if taken to excessive lengths, such as attempting to synchronise sound to the sharpening of a pencil or to feet walking through grass, the method becomes ludicrous and merely irritates the audience as well as driving the sound-recordist out of his mind.

All direct synchronised sound need not be obtained at the same time as the picture. Often it is found that a particular noise can be more satisfactorily (from a recordist's point of view) produced by other means in the studio, a point with which we shall deal in our next section.

Generally speaking, therefore, synchronised sound

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and speech obtained simultaneously do not play a large part in documentary production. In fact, I can think of few documentaries where it has formed anything but a small incident necessary to the subject, as in *B.B.C: The Voice of Britain* and *Citizens of the Future*. There is a practical point that we might well remember in this connection—the greater difficulties attending the portability of sound equipment when compared with the compactness of the modern automatic picture camera. Sound-trucks are essentially large and cumbersome objects. They attract attention, disturb the natural characteristics of the material being shot and upset the intimacy which the documentalist tries to create between himself and his subject. Mobile sound, as we shall see, is most useful for the gathering of natural wildtracks, in which case it is used separately from the picture camera.

There remains a third kind of synchronised sound—the much-discussed commentary or narration. One method, the easier and therefore the most used, is to engage a well-sounding person—often with broadcasting or theatrical associations—and have him recite the written comment with one eye on the typescript and the other on the screen. The result is generally adequate to the type of film for which it is used: impersonal, without feeling and, I suppose, to be regarded as inoffensive. The other, more experimental method, is to make use of people actually engaged on the work with which the picture deals—sometimes an engineer, perhaps a ship's draughtsman, possibly a miner, docker, postman or journalist. I do not think

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the voice itself is of great importance. It is the sincerity and understanding and intimacy with which the words are delivered that is valuable.

There is room here for considerable experiment, for use of different dialects according to the locations of the subject, for the merging of more than one voice as the film develops, a device that was skilfully used in *B.B.C: The Voice of Britain*. There is room, also, for experiment in relating more intimately the voice with the screen, perhaps to be achieved with less formality and more spontaneity, so that the speaker becomes a part of the film rather than the detached 'Voice of God' which seems so dear to some producers of documentary. The personal interview, at present badly used in news-reels, might well be tried, so long as the characterisation is interesting. Let the smith in charge of the steam-hammer tell us in his own language what he is doing. Let the shot-firer in the mine speak of his own job. They can do it better than the professional commentator at three guineas a time; in simpler, more humble and more honest speech. Yet another line that might be developed is that of the poet as narrator. I am surprised that the poet has not already been enlisted to documentary. We have talked of poetry in style and poetry in visual image but there has been scarcely any attempt to introduce poetry into film speech. Grierson is, I believe, making some experiment in this direction. Auden's use of chorus in *Coal Face* was stimulating. It was unfortunate that the recording was not better. Poetry, the chorus, and the use of several speakers in rotation all provide lines of

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development for the narration, for getting right away from the conventional method of the professional commentator.

Where commentary is concerned, the question of synchronisation arises only when the commentator is speaking his words directly with the picture before him. For untrained speakers, such as we have suggested, a much more satisfactory method is the speaking of the sentences 'wildtrack', quite separately from the picture, the two being brought together on the cutting-bench and by re-recording. Not only does this achieve greater accuracy of synchronisation but it permits the commentary to be changed, sentences deleted and transferred, after the words have been fixed on to film.

(b) *Non-Synchronised Sound and Speech.* The collection of non-synchronised sound and speech, that is to say the recording of required sound divorced from the picture shooting, presents one of the most fascinating and experimental aspects of the sound medium. Familiarly, the process is called 'wildtrack', meaning the gathering of all kinds of speech and sound on to track which can later be cut up and edited into loops and sub-tracks for re-recording with the mute. Here both the sound-truck and recording studio are useful. Some of our sounds, for example, may be such that they can only be obtained on the spot—like the shunting of trains in a goods-yard, the general conversation and noise of a sorting-office or the characteristic sounds of a railway station. In such cases, the sound-truck is indispensable and can bring back to the cutting-room a wealth of interesting sounds from

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the world at large. Other sounds are better fabricated in the recording studio, particularly sounds which, for dramatic reasons, are required to be isolated from their surroundings. The dirge of a dredger, for instance, may be manufactured by (1) rubbing a pencil on a child's slate, (2) drawing the sharp edge of a spade across a concrete floor, and (3) pushing an empty iron tank around on a floor scattered with small pebbles. All three sounds are recorded separately and mixed together into one track at a final recording. Expansion of such methods is limited only by ingenuity. A million-volt-arc, in itself a terrifying sound, may be easily fabricated by recording (1) tearing strips of calico close to the microphone, (2) striking matches, (3) using the peak points only of a track-record of a cracking stockwhip, and (4) dropping pebbles on to a metal plate. Each of these sounds is recorded singly, the tracks cut up, some put in reverse and arranged into synchronisation with each other. The whole four are re-recorded on to one final track into which small lengths of unmodulated (mute) track are inserted to form the necessary breaks in the sound. The choice between sound thus artificially created and real sound recorded on the spot is, once again, a question of convenience and practicability. The skill lies not in how they are recorded but in what manner they are used. This we shall come to presently.

Speech may be used and recorded in much the same way. Criticism has been raised against the employment of the disembodied voice, by which is meant the introduction of conversation and incidental speech

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without direct synchronisation with the imaginary speakers. The trick can, without doubt, be overworked and misused, but with restraint, wildtrack recordings of casual sentences or ejaculations can be of considerable atmospheric value. The speech may take various forms according to the subject. Soliloquy or monologue or three-part talk all play their part. Comments on sport, allotments, homelife all offer likely topics. Employment, for obvious reasons, is dangerous ground where we are dealing with industrial conditions. Frequently the disembodied voice may be used to make reference to the visual action without showing the origin of the comments. Telephone conversations between, say, works-managers and shop-foremen might be overlaid on shots of men at the job which is the topic under discussion. Radio again offers further opportunities. The chorus may be used to imaginative effect, not just the orthodox chorus of voices but the chorus of sounds used in repetition. Shouts, orders, ejaculations, exclamations, humming, whistling, each may be incorporated into the sound script, recorded wildtrack and be edited into position for a final re-recording. Experiment may be extended indefinitely.

(c) *Music*. Music always has and, I believe, always will form a valuable part of film creation. It performs certain duties in the exciting of human emotions which cannot be replaced by the use of either speech or sound. To use Walter Leigh's phrase: 'It is an artificial organisation of sound for purely emotional purposes, a representation of physical movement in

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terms of sound and rhythm.¹ But one thing is quite obvious, that music required to-day for incorporation into the sound band, along with natural sound and speech, is absolutely different from either orthodox concert music, or from the kind of music which was written as an accompaniment to silent films and later for synchronised scores. The old idea that music must fulfil the function of an undercurrent to the picture, just quiet enough to prevent distraction from the screen, being faded down when the commentator speaks and faded up again when he has finished, this is as antiquated as the type of film for which it is still used.

Modern music for sound film must be an integral part of the sound script, must on occasions be allowed to dominate the picture, must on others perform merely an atmospheric function and frequently it must be intermixed with natural sound and speech. From what has already been done in this way, principally in Leigh's interesting work for *The Song of Ceylon*, I gather that economy is the most important factor. A short phrase or a few bars of music can express, it appears, the equivalent of a complete movement in a symphony. Consequently, the writing of film music must start from a basis quite different from that associated with orthodox musical composition. Similarly, because of the microphone's peculiar capacities for reproduction, instrumentation can be arranged on much more economical lines than for ordinary musical perform-

¹ 'The Musician and the Film', Walter Leigh, *Cinema Quarterly*, vol. III, no. 2.

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ances. By a shrewd use of balance, that is the arranging of instruments before the microphone according to their proportionate volumes, four or five instruments can be made to perform the work of three times the number, with equal if not greater success. The old belief that a large orchestra is necessary for powerful effect is, I understand, rendered obsolete by a proper understanding of the resources of the microphone.

(ii) Creative Uses

The foregoing is, then, an indication of how the raw materials of sound, both synchronised and wildtrack, may be collected from natural and artificial sources. We have seen that, like the picture camera, the microphone has immense powers for gathering fragments of the world's sound, together with specially contrived passages of artificial music and spoken words, from which the documentalist may create his sound band. This raw material, let us emphasise again, has no importance in itself. Its methods of collection and fabrication are interesting only as details attending reproduction. The final problem is always contained in how this sound is to be used creatively, how it is to be lifted from the status of mere description to the function of bringing alive actuality to special purpose.

From the scope presented by the wealth of raw sound material, it is clear that sound can bring to documentary a contribution which will take many years to explore. It offers to the creative director not only an unlimited library of speech, music and natural sound, but the infinite possibilities opened up by the

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use of chorus, monologue and fabricated sound. It presents a score of different elements which can be employed to create drama, atmosphere, tension, tempo and poetic reference for any theme which may be provided. In fact, sound more than doubles the expressive capabilities of the silent film and puts the whole method of interpretation on a higher and more influential basis than before. Because of this increased power, therefore, there is need for the strictest discipline and organisation in the composition of the sound band and careful analysis, not only of its own structure, but of its continuous relationship to the picture with which it is wedded.

No longer is it possible, as in the early days of sound film, to regard the sound band as just an accompaniment to the picture. Listened to alone, the sound band of a film may form a disconnected series of sounds and words, music and intervals of silence. But heard in conjunction with the picture for which it is intended, the sound band presents not merely an arrangement of sounds, words and music to explain the meaning of the visuals but an integral part of the picture itself, appealing to the reason as well as to the emotions of the audience. It is obvious that the structural composition of the sound band requires just as much creative thought and work as that of the mute and, in some cases, may take longer to produce than the edited picture. This is a difficult point for the commercially-minded producer to appreciate with his fixed ideas of 'fitting sound to a picture'.

There is, above all, this important fact to remember:

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that sound attached to picture immediately produces a curious sensation of intimacy. Observed in silence, a film builds up a barrier of illusion between itself and the spectator. No matter how intimately observed and edited, the material on the screen is separated from the audience by an unreal sense of illusion. But with the addition of sound, whether synchronous or not, that barrier is partially removed. The audience cannot prevent itself from participating in the action shown on the screen. This peculiar quality of sound can, and often is, a source of danger. On the one hand, it tends to permit carelessness to arise in the making of the sound band and to permit the selection of one sound rather than another, not because of its particular significance, but because of its capacity for producing a sense of reality. And on the other, it induces slackness in the making of the picture, permitting a less selective choice of visuals in the belief that the sound band will cover the shortcomings. These two dangers have been especially noticeable in some recent documentaries, where visuals have been used which, formerly, would have been discarded without discussion, and also where sounds have been included merely because of their sensational effect and not because of their significance in the expression of the content.

Every sound in a cinema, just as every movement on the screen, is significant. We must remember that there is a great difference between film sound and ordinary everyday sound, or even sound heard in a legitimate theatre. In actuality we select for ourselves those sounds which are important and unusual and,

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for the most part, disregard normal sounds of which we know the origin. In the city street, for example, we are so accustomed to the noise of traffic that we pay little attention to it, unless a particular sound, such as a burst tyre or a motor-horn, warns us of something abnormal. In a restaurant, the familiar clatter of plates and the buzz of conversation proceed unheeded until, perhaps, a dish is dropped or a disturbance occurs, when immediately we look for the cause of the unexpected noise. And, secondly, except in abnormal circumstances, sound comes to our ears from all directions. Sound is occurring, or may occur, all around us.

On the stage, similar but more confined conditions are present. Out of the various sounds that issue from the stage into the auditorium, we select instinctively those which are important, such as speech, laughter, a telephone ringing or a knock at the door. But we ignore those which have no significance to the action (unless they are unexpected elements of surprise), like the sound of commonplace movements, footsteps and suchlike. In the cinema, however, the situation is quite different. Every sound issues from one source, the loudspeaker. Consequently every sound is received by the audience with equal attention until its screen origin is ascertained and its significance understood. The smallest of sounds may, in this way, assume temporary importance, may even be misunderstood in meaning if there is doubt as to its origin. Thus it is obvious that every sound, passage of speech and music incorporated in the sound band must be placed there

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for a definite, intentional meaning and all extraneous sound omitted, a principle that has direct bearing on the problem of 'seeing an object and hearing its sound' discussed earlier. For this reason, it is patently absurd to insist on the inclusion of every sound of which we may see the origin unless some significance is thereby served, a habit often pursued by pseudo-documentalists who seem incapable of understanding the first principles of sound.

From these elementary observations, you will grasp that the writing of the sound script in documentary is of first importance. Like the visual script, it is elastic in detail. It sets out the treatment of sound which will be employed, gives a clear idea of what raw material is required and how it will be manipulated, at a later stage, during the actual task of creating the sound band, which comes about through the inter-working of two processes.

(a) *The Cutting-Bench.* Once sound has been fixed on to film, by a photo-electric process of which a description here is unnecessary, it can be cut and arranged, pieced together and interrelated, precisely in the same manner as mute film. You will be aware, of course, that right up till the time of making the final synchronised print, sound and picture bands, both positive and negative, are manipulated separately. With a pair of scissors, some cement and a movieola on which to hear your tracks, any one sound can be placed in front of, or after, another sound, no matter whether it has been obtained synchronously or wild-track. You may, if you like, reverse your track and

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play it backwards. You may cut out a certain peak point and discard the rest of the sound. You may separate sounds with silence by inserting unmodulated, that is noiseless, track. You may, with the aid of a synchronising-machine, place any length of sound you please alongside any length of picture, so that they synchronise or not as the desire may be. In fact, you may juggle with your sound and picture tracks alongside each other until your energy is exhausted, after which you may begin to re-cut. Whole sections of your film may be constructed in this manner, single sounds or words against corresponding visuals. Other sections may require other sounds to be mixed on top of your existing sounds, in which case we come to the second process of editing which entails using the re-recording panel.

(b) *The Re-recording Panel.* By simple cutting and synchronising you may put any sound alongside any picture. By re-recording, you can put any sound, or series of sounds, on top of another sound, so that one may be heard through the other. Or you may overlap one sound into another at any given point for purposes of continuity. Alternatively, you may bring some sounds up loud and diminish others to quietness, thereby providing foreground and background. You can not only superimpose sounds, speech and music by the fusion of several tracks into one final track, but you can orchestrate your sounds by giving them different volumes according to your desired effect. The re-recording panel, with its possibilities of merging together at the same time edited tracks, endless loops

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of constant sound and additional sound or speech direct from a microphone in synchronisation with the picture, offers probably the widest field for experiment of any instrument employed in film production. Its variations and potentialities for orchestrated sound are infinite. It only remains for the documentalist to use its resources to the full, provided he is given the time in which to experiment by his producer.

These, then, are the instruments and processes which may be used for creative purpose, through which sound may be made an integral part of picture, so that the whole film may be powerfully expressive of the subject at hand. From the experiments that have so far been made, there seem to be two directions in which sound technique has been developed—imagistic and atmospheric sound.

With the remarkable flexibility of sound tracks, by cutting and re-recording, it will have been clear that the disassociation of picture from sound might be expected to lead to interesting results. Such a method does, it is true, put an unaccustomed strain on the attention of the spectator, who is accustomed to hearing sound in direct connection with picture. Thus we must stress that the greatest care should be observed to avoid confusion in this co-ordinating of sight and sound through ideas rather than through logical perception. It is, in a sense, using sounds as symbols to obtain emotional effect. We are familiar with the sound of a syren which inevitably accompanies every shot of a liner in the amusement cinema. We are, in fact, so

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familiar that the sound alone will suggest the liner without the latter being shown. The method may be pursued. A dog barking in the distance overlaid on shots of a village can suggest a lazy, hot summer's afternoon. A train whistle over an industrial landscape can suggest industrial activity. An aeroplane sound can suggest height without the machine being seen. In a Pudovkin film, there was mention of a street fight between workers and police. The sound of fists was replaced by the sounds of industry: symbols of the power for which the workers stood. The method is not a freak of clever technique. It is a very important feature in the imaginative use of sound and can add great strength to the dramatisation of actuality. But this is not all.

It has been found that as soon as sounds are separated from their sources, they become images or symbols of those sources; a fact which permits more than one idea to be projected at the same time by a single shot. We may go further. When separated from its source, a sound will not only become a symbol of that source but a symbol of what that source represents. The ship's syren becomes not only the symbol of a ship, but it may also become the symbol of warning. A bell may be a symbol of a coastguard station but it may also be a symbol of hope, or tragedy, as occasion arises. There is, for example, the ending of Ekk's *Road to Life*. The train draws up in the village bearing on its engine the dead body of the boy. A great crowd awaits it. But there is silence except for the hiss of the escaping steam, which expresses the grief of the crowd with its

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long drawn-out sighing. The steam is used as a symbol of grief. The closing shots of *Six-Thirty Collection* showed the cleaners sweeping up the litter in the sorting-office after the work is done: over them is heard the puffing of a departing train.

Extensions of this imagistic use of sound are found in Wright's *Song of Ceylon*. The rhythmic noise of a mountain train is continued over an elephant pushing down a tree, an association of power and at the same time a comment. The market prices of tea, spoken by radio-announcers and dictated in letter form by business executives, are overlaid on scenes of natives picking in the tea gardens, the 'Yours truly' and 'Your obedient servant' of the dictation being ironically synchronised over the natives at their respective tasks. In *The Face of Britain* the plea for slum clearance is ironically commented upon by shots of slums overlaid with the sound of explosions; but the slums remain unchanged.

Atmospheric sound often develops on a principle of cross-sectioning. The same, perhaps conservation, perhaps dance music, perhaps a prayer or an S.O.S. message, is carried out over a cross-section of the community in town and countryside. The music of a barrel-organ, previously associated with busy town life, is overlaid on shots of a shipyard where the hull of a growing ship lies idle. A religious anthem is prolonged beyond the service in a cathedral and laid over a cross-section of blast furnaces and coal mines, shipping and agriculture. I cite from examples of recent films but the method has scarcely as yet been

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explored. You will see that, in sympathy with documentary's major aim, it is capable of the widest of human references. The future of sound, linked up with dramatic, symphonic and poetic elements, will be inherent in the future of documentary. Sound will be inseparable from sight: the two together indicate the power with which documentary is now invested.

C. Treatment

Before almost anything else, we must stress the importance of the director's awareness of the continual change and growth in his material. Before he can create, before he can become in any way significant in his work, he must be able to understand the social relationships contained in his theme and be dynamic in his social analysis. Not only must he feel his subject and its implications in his head but in his heart. He must feel and interpret as his natural material feels, or else he will never create on the screen. His actors are natural people and he must understand their mentality, their background and their outlook before he can train his camera on their actions. This understanding is, I think, an attribute possessed more by Flaherty than by any other documentalist, noticeable especially in his *Nanook* and the handling of the craftsmen—potters and glassblowers—in *Industrial Britain*. It was the secret behind Macharet's observation of his actor-workmen in *Men and Jobs* and of Grierson's interpretation of the seamen in *Drifters* and *Granton Trawler*. Each of these directors felt with his actors,

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understood their movements and behaviour, analysed their thoughts and emotions, knew what lay in their minds, before daring to bring their cameras to focus and turning celluloid.

I put this point strongly because, as a new generation of would-be documentalists grows up, I see an increasing tendency towards an avoidance of these vital requirements. Young men, enthusiastic and excited, are sent out with units on jobs before any attempt has first been made to analyse their material. Back they come, often with lovely photographic effects (for which the credit should go to the cameraman), are praised for the good-looks or sensational effects of their work, but in almost every case they have missed the essential importance of their subject. Here, yet again, does the absence of proper production supervision give cause for alarm.

(i) Approach and Style

From what we have seen of documentary work, there would appear to be several styles of approach to material and subject bound up in the various traditions, each dictated by the purpose for which the film is being made, as well as by the personal inclinations of the producer or director in question. But at this present immature stage of the documentary method, I intend dealing with only two kinds of style: those which seem to be most prevalent in current production and of which examples are ready to hand.

Firstly, there is the descriptive, or journalist, approach. Secondly, the impressionist method. Neither

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may, at this point in documentary's case-book, be claimed as superior to the other. Their choice is a matter of production purpose combined with the personal preference of the directors concerned.

The aim of the descriptive documentary would seem to be an honest effort to report, describe or delineate a series of events, or the nature of a process, or the workings of an organisation on the screen. It has been defined as a method of *reportage*. It is well exemplified in Elton's *Housing Problems*. The less your journalist director sensationalises his material, the better is his purpose served, because by dramatisation he would sacrifice exactness for impressionism. Actually, there is no such thing as a descriptive film because the camera, microphone and reproducing apparatus do not give a completely faithful representation of what they record. The illusion of accuracy is, however, sufficiently good as to be found generally acceptable.

The authentic descriptive film, therefore, prohibits that dramatisation of natural material which is the essence of the impressionist approach. It does, I gather, permit a certain mild sensationalising of event and a creation of suspense related to incident, but only so long as the accuracy of the reporting is not impaired. Its major purpose of information demands a great deal of analysis of subject before film interpretation is attempted; an understanding of mechanics if machinery is being treated; a grasp of detailed organisation if a public service is being put on the screen. It deals with a process rather than with the results of that process. It may occasionally fly off at a tangent into pure

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sensationalism, as in the end part of Elton's *Aero-Engine*, but this is merely a concession to the private desires of the director. It is concerned with the working of this or that, rather than with the effects of such working. And although, I suspect, every technical resource should be employed, it aims to instruct rather than to enlighten its audience by pursuit of a literary as opposed to an emotional appeal.

In the long run, this *reportage* approach is, I am inclined to think, more difficult than the impressionist style, although the latter requires a wider sensibility to human emotions and a more general knowledge of human affairs than the pure descriptive approach. But impressionism does not, as is frequently asserted, necessarily imply a superficial approach. On the contrary, it demands just such an exacting understanding of material as the *reportage* method, but it selects only those elements of the subject which are capable of dramatisation. It aims to produce a general emotional effect and not a detailed literary description. It aims to disturb the audience emotionally, to make it feel for itself the social or other references contained in the subject. But it is a mistake to assume that by so doing the impressionist method is any the less instructive as far as the wider issues of education may be served. Its dramatic interpretation, its free use of climax and tension, create a consciousness which, I suggest, leads to a demand for more detailed knowledge. Your descriptive style, on the other hand, supplies both knowledge and information without first creating the demand.

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There is little doubt, moreover, that in consideration of the present state of education among theatre audiences, a state which has come about through years of entertainment nourishment and bourgeois methods of upbringing, the impressionist style of documentary is the more successful as far as the projection of socio-logical themes is concerned. The time will probably come when the descriptive style will find its required level of interest among theatre audiences, but that time, in my experience, is not yet. The documentary intended primarily for theatre distribution must, I am sure, be dramatic in style and form even at the risk of losing accuracy of report. It is the broad impression which is most necessary and it is only the impressionist method that will sufficiently emotionalise factual material to secure significant audience response.

I am aware that the impressionist style is regarded with mistrust and, for that matter, we have already exposed the dangers of the Continental Realists begun by *Berlin*. At the same time, I believe that the weakness of the pseudo-realists lies more in their lack of social analysis and their delight in aestheticism for its own sake than in their impressionist style. On the other hand, impressionism has one major weakness—resort to symbolism. It is in the nature of the method to search for symbols which will express an idea, rather than an interpretation of facts by more analytical research. The use of a smoking factory chimney to symbolise Industry, or of a parade of revolving wheels to express Power, is a dangerous escape from facts into superficial impressions for sensational effect. You will

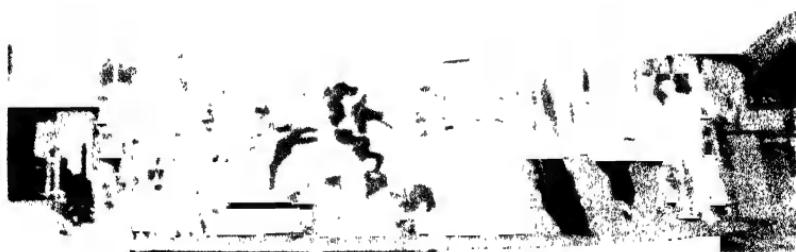
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remember the subterfuge of the bull's wedding in *The General Line*; and I have a weight on my mind about the shirking of issues in the last part of *The Face of Britain*. To slide into the use of symbols instead of getting down to a straightforward representation of the facts is the outstanding failing of the impressionist style and must, I think, be very seriously suppressed if the impressionist method is to be significant.

From our distinctions between the two styles, it may seem that the impressionist and reporting methods deny each other, but this, in my opinion, is only a temporary phase arising out of the first difficulties of the documentalist tackling really important problems and subject-matter. A synthesis of both styles is not improbable; is, in fact, quite definitely indicated in some directions. We have seen, for example, how such a combination coincided with that other major problem of documentary—the interpretation of the human being.

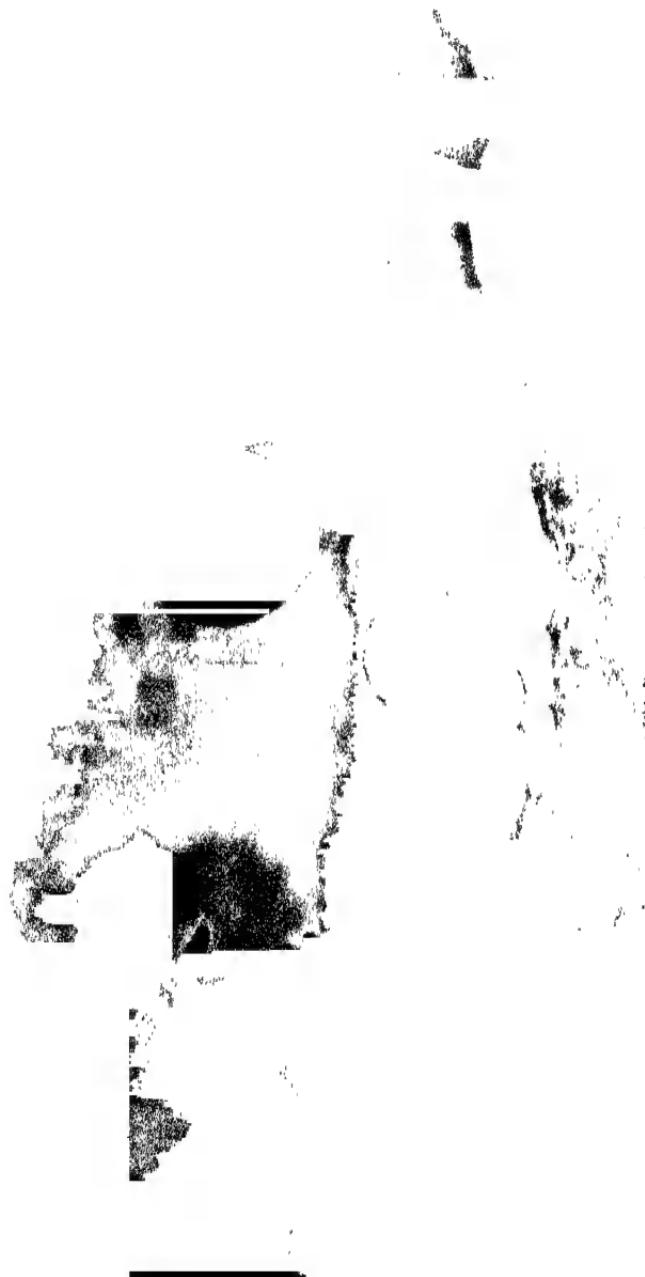
(ii) Structure and Scenario

From our survey of materials and methods, it will be clear that the composition and writing of the documentary script is quite different from that of the scenario of the orthodox story-film. Some indication of this has been made when we dealt with sound. Whereas the scenario of the story-film may, and should, contain a detailed shot-description of the final film, even to the extent of elaborate camera instructions and set designs, the documentary script is concerned primarily with expressing the attitude towards the theme, the refer-



QUE VIVA MEXICO (Eisenstein & Alexandrov)

EKSTASE (Machaty)



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ences involved and the construction and interrelation of the sequences. In the majority of documentary subjects, the material is obviously quite raw and unrehearsed. A great deal of the actual shooting is purely impulsive, governed by the spontaneous action and unanticipated nature of the events. It is possible, of course, to obtain in advance a fairly accurate grasp of what will occur when the camera is turning, but natural behaviour is not always repetitive and your documentalist must, for the most part, shoot at sight. For this reason, it is imperative that the documentalist should be given opportunity for the preparation of his shooting and adequate time for the study of his subject before going into production, both factors which eventually reduce the costs of the picture.

The original script in documentary provides a very fair indication of the material wanted but it does not, and for obvious reasons cannot, give anything approaching a laborious description of the finished picture. It is concerned especially with the form of the projected film and, if dramatic in purpose, with the crises that arise naturally from the subject and their place in the development of continuity. It is on this ground that, I believe, the journalist or descriptive documentary sometimes fails, because there is a prevalent tendency to discard orthodox methods of construction and to allow the film to describe as it pursues its course of reporting.

This deliberate suppression of crisis in the *reportage* method, this studied avoidance of sensationalised event, tends to deprive the documentary of its form,

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another point we may make in favour of the impressionist style, which unashamedly admits the use of conventional peak points and a gradually developing curve of continuity through the film. Wright's *Song of Ceylon*, I feel, would have gained emotionally by a greater dramatisation of his material, which might have resulted from a simpler conception than the four-part dialectic method adopted. This, also, is my criticism of many of the Grierson group's documentaries—that they are often formless and inclined to wander rather than march from start to finish. The series of films made by Elton and Anstey for the British Commercial Gas Association particularly displays this shortcoming. *Potemkin* is, in my opinion, still the model of classic form and sequence construction; with *Turksib* not so far behind.

Not all form, however, need take the beat of a marching tempo. In view of the instructional and far-reaching persuasions of documentary, consideration might be given to a tempo of revelation. By a nobility of treatment, it is possible to present the theme and facts of some subjects by a process of revealing, not unlike the unfolding of the petals of a flower in slow motion, until the full content and form are displayed for the audience to draw its conclusions. Imagery and poetry will here find their fullest use. The documentary method may, on the one hand, take the violent fighting line of a *Turksib*, or it may, on the other, observe the point that first implications are not always the most important and pursue a course of revelation, as in *The Song of Ceylon*.

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Which style is chosen for which subject depends wholly on the purpose to be served and the director's particular ability. The relation of tempo to form, that is the control of movement both of material and of editing in relation to subject, has still to be made the aim of experiment.

Form and construction immediately raise the question of length, to which we have already made reference. Generally speaking, I am in a minority when I plead for brevity in documentary, but my feeling on this much-discussed problem is probably influenced more by experience of documentary reception in the theatres than by personal inclination. The comparison between radio talks, journalism and documentary has been made before, but it must be underlined. In their more serious aspects, each is concerned with the representation of facts and arguments to the people. And whatever the size of their subject, they are the better for simple statement and economy of style. As things are at present and however deplorable you may think it, you cannot get away from the fact that the ordinary public goes into the theatres to see stars and stories—unless it happens to be a wet afternoon. Until very drastic changes of a social kind are made, this position will continue and must, therefore, be taken into consideration when we discuss the methods and effects of propaganda and instruction.

If it is to have a place in the public theatres to-day, documentary must come second to artificiality and seduction. But it is, I think, none the less influential for that. We must make allowance for a tolerant and

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mildly uninterested audience, upon whom our films must create emotional effect as well as persuade to a certain way of thinking. To do this most successfully is to do it swiftly. To shift not only apathy, but to stimulate interest and even feeling, demands conciseness and crispness in film and sureness and sincerity in its director. So many documentaries look well in the private-theatre. So many evoke the respect of fellow-technicians. But so few stand up against the lethargy of the public audience in the mass. And if propaganda is being served that, all in all, is the final test.

The documentary scenario, then, is something like the treatment stage of the story-film script, except that it sets out very distinctly the social references contained in the subject. Typical material, both human and inanimate, is collected and studied, where practicable, at first hand. It is discussed in conference with the producer and other directors, and from it are improvised the events and characterisation of the film. In it is described what form the dialectic will take. In it are indicated the particular elements of irony and symbolism, poetic reference and symphonic movement, which it is believed will most effectively express the theme according to the purpose in view.

At the same time we must remember that the whole conception and its theoretical working out is elastic, for should you work strictly according to the written script, you will not introduce anything which might arise during actual shooting. It was not until Eisenstein saw the Odessa Steps that he conceived the famous sequence. Although the script should, wher-

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ever possible, contain the broad lines of treatment and the sociological or other references arising from the theme, nevertheless the documentalist must be free to work according to his feelings all along. He must be at liberty to incorporate certain incidents and motives which may suddenly arise from his subject during the making of the film after the first script-work has been done.

The matter of construction and continuity is again governed by purpose and subject but, if the theory is held by your director, dialectic as a method of philosophical statement can play an important part in structure and treatment. Reference has already been made to the dialectic method of film treatment in connection with Eisenstein's approach to the historical material of *October*. And it was upon similar lines that he apparently conceived the abortive *Que Viva Mexico*. Most of the work of other Russian directors has been dependent on the same dialectic basis, but most of them, as we have said earlier, have failed to achieve a representation of the synthesis that arises from the meeting of opposing forces. The issue is closely related to the problem of expressing the human being, to which we have also paid attention earlier. Eisenstein's *October* was the dialectic of the mass; Pudovkin's *St Petersburg* was the dialectic of the individual expressing the mass; Dovjenko's *Earth* was the dialectic of natural forces.

Despite the absence in the past of a completely successful working out of a theme by the dialectic method in terms of film, there seems every reason to

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believe that a most interesting method of documentary may eventuate from this line of development. All the principles which we have discovered in the documentary approach to actuality combine in support of this suggestion. Most frequently we have found that it is the social and economic relations contained in the theme which are the real controlling forces of documentary. Ideas arising from the theme have seldom been so important as the facts. Only in the romantic traditions of the naturalistic school and the superficial rhythms of the Continental Realists has idealism been allowed to displace materialism. 'The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life', wrote Marx.¹ This reasoning lies behind the approach to every successful documentary which has been produced. Wherever they are working, every documentalist who is creating significant product to-day is, I suggest, basing his outlook on the belief that it is the material circumstances of civilisation which give rise to and govern the current ideas of society. The mind of the documentalist is trained best, I believe, by moving in a dialectic pattern, although it must be pointed out that this has nothing whatsoever to do with the nature of the facts contained within his subject. The dialectical reasoning is concerned with the attitude of mind of the director and not with the subject-material with which he is working.

As is widely known, the dialectic is a method of philosophical reasoning. As explained in a recent

¹ Preface to *Critique of Political Economy*.

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analysis,¹ it supposes a pattern of (1) a proposition, (2) a contradiction arising from that proposition, and (3) a reconciliation of the two, thus providing a pattern-of-three prescription, familiarly epitomised by (1) thesis, (2) antithesis, and (3) synthesis. Upon this formula the whole dialectic theory is based and, despite the fact that by some modern authorities it is considered an out-of-date method when applied to history, we can see with little effort its possible application to the film, both in approach to subject and in technical construction. The dialectic as drama is conflict and must dictate the structure of the film. The pattern-of-three arises again and again during production: in the fundamental composition of the film strip (the conflict between frame and frame, shot and shot, etc.), the building up of symphonic movement (comparative rhythms), the imagistic use of sound (two motives expressed simultaneously giving rise to a third idea), the structure of sequences and, indeed, quite possibly in the structure of the film as a whole.

The dialectic approach can, and does, govern the analysis of action in documentary. In every job undertaken, whether it is the hauling-in of fishing nets or the driving of a rivet, there are conflicting forces, the second arising out of the first, and from their clash results a synthesis. Into this interpretation of material, the documentalist may, according to his character, introduce the elements of poetic imagery, dramatic tension and symphonic movement. And from one single sequence, the method may be extended to the whole.

¹ *Karl Marx*, R. W. Postgate (Hamish Hamilton), 1933.

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To judge from the published versions of the scenario, the *Que Viva Mexico* film was to have taken the shape of a dialectic interpretation from an historical materialistic point of view of the past, present and supposed future of the Mexican people in a series of self-contained but dialectically interdependent episodes. The conception, according to the flimsily constructed synopsis, was of very broad dimensions, drawing on existing material, both as heritages of the past and actualities of the living present, in order to express an intellectual approach that would have lifted the film on to a high plane of creative endeavour.

Under existing conditions of production, whether for propaganda or profit, or both, there is a possibility of developing documentary on a dialectic basis in the form of a plain statement of facts, from which the audience may draw its own conclusions. It presupposes, from a propagandist point of view, a greater social and political consciousness among the people than actually exists. But the dialectic approach, it may be argued, is in any case indecisive and does not demand positive conclusions to be made on the part of the director. As such, of course, it falls outside the scope of specific propaganda. In Wright's films of the West Indies, for example, the working conditions of the negro are thrown into sharp relief with the scientific mechanisation of Western methods of banana portage. In his *Song of Ceylon*, the traditional customs, religious ceremonies and daily husbandry are placed in juxtaposition with the demands of Western commercial methods. In both cases, the attitude is ex-

CARGO FROM JAMAICA (Wright)





PESCADOS (Strand)

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pressed by an impartial representation of the facts, implying a philosophical and not a political intention. The at-present unfinished documentary of the Vera Cruz fishermen's fight against the encroachment of vested interests, *Pescados*, produced by the Secretariat of Education of the late Mexican Government under the supervision of Paul Strand, would also seem to fall into this class of dialectic form.

This is a method of tactics which, for all too obvious reasons, is bound to be developed in Western documentary. If there is a social conscience to be served, restrictions of censorship and difficulties of production daily become more acute. If he is to continue creating, and at the same time avoid prostituting his work in the interests of capital, it will be imperative for the documentalist to perfect an approach which will ensure his freedom.

III. CONCLUSIONS

No matter its complexities, it is a mistake, I think, to work over a documentary film too long. Time of production—script, shooting, sound and cutting—is naturally conditioned by the subject and economic circumstances. At the same time, if production continues over an extended period, or is interrupted by other events or films, first impulses go and the nervous strain gives rise to bad judgment. From a mentally creative aspect, the process of film making is obviously quite different from that of literature or, for that matter, any of the other media of expression.

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I do not pretend that the foregoing notes regarding practical production are exhaustive; nor do I pretend that the theories set out and discussed are fulfilled in my own attempts at production. Rather are they to be regarded as an amplification of other estimates undertaken by other and more able minds, in an effort to gather together in logical ordering some of the unsorted and unframed attitudes towards this new method of film. The materials and theories of cinema change so quickly, moreover, and are so closely related to the changing events of everyday life that, unless we occasionally take stock of how things are shaping, documentary will sink into that morass of bad theory and illogical argument which characterises the story-film to-day. Already colour has been jockeyed into a place in the commercial cinema. Television lies ready as a further step. And we should not disregard the importance of these two new processes to the future of documentary.

Prophecy in cinema is a dangerous practice. A dozen events, economic or otherwise, may alter any theories which we may now form about colour and television. Colour has not so far entered the documentary sphere as a serious element. Television is not yet placed on a general practical basis, although that day seems near. On the other hand, nearly seven years passed after the commercial introduction of sound before we were able to use it to creative ends in documentary. Probably a similar state of affairs will arise with colour and television, but although both may ultimately mean a reorientation of technical theory, neither colour nor

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television is likely to change the fundamental principles of documentary as an interpretation of social relationships.

From our knowledge of the aims of commercial cinema, primarily devoted to using the film for telling stories, we may safely assume that colour plus stereoscopic effect are inevitable stages leading ultimately to television. On economic grounds, as well as to preserve its remoteness from actuality for social reasons already explained, the story-film is most likely to remain a matter of studio manufacture. Both stereoscopic colour and television suggest an eventual elimination of all but the simplest form of cutting (possibly just fading and mixing from one scene to another as in current radio-plays) and a reduction to the minimum of visual camera positions in a tendency towards complete theatrical representation by mechanical means. In this medium, the writer, producer and actors will play the most important parts along with the technicians in control of the mixing of sight and sound.

Despite the undeniable popular success of this kind of expression, a mixture of sound-film and stage-play, I cannot see that this move towards the realistic reproduction of what will still be artificiality will interfere with the creative treatment of actuality as attempted by present documentary. Not only in its technical developments but in its subjects and styles, we must realise that the story-film is moving more and more away from reality. Nothing short of a complete social and educative upheaval due to economic pressure will

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alter this. Documentary and other kinds of 'real-life' expression, on the other hand, are appealing to an ever-widening market as social consciousness among the people develops. In order to serve fully that market, documentary will, I feel, preserve its elements of camera mobility and flexibility of sound and visual images but, at the same time, broaden its human references. There is every indication, I believe, that the already wide divergence between the artificially-made amusement film and the creative, semi-instructional documentary method will continue to grow both in manufacture and exhibition.

To return to the present, however inadequate may be the preceding survey, at least it suggests the existence of documentary as a particular kind of film which has arisen to meet special demands. Further, if my reasoning has been sound, it gives every sign that there lies ahead of the documentary method a wide vista of development provided certain conditions are contrived. Production must be placed on a firm economic basis, for which propaganda seems a possible solution. Studio traditions and conventions must be forgotten. Distribution to both existing theatres and the important growing field of non-theatrical circulation must be organised competently and with foresight. And, above all, documentary must have its roots planted firmly in the soil of real facts and necessities. The documentary method of expression must be the voice of the people speaking from the homes and factories and fields of the people. As a consequence its future lies inevitably in the future of society.

CONCLUSIONS

Whether it be warfare or collective security, the abolition of classes or a continuance of some kind of democracy, the establishment of nationalist systems or a world of united races and peoples, or the final collapse of capitalism before the forces of socialism—documentary must always be dictated by the needs of society. What shape that society will assume lies in our own hands and it is imperative that each one of us should realise this. The documentary method is only a channel of expression. The most important question of all is: What sort of propaganda shall we allow it to project?

**APPENDIX OF DOCUMENTARY
DIRECTORS AND THEIR
PRINCIPAL FILMS**

APPENDIX OF DOCUMENTARY DIRECTORS AND THEIR PRINCIPAL FILMS

The following list has been selected for the purpose of aiding the reader to trace the development of the documentary method in cinema. It has been compiled on a strictly qualitative basis and no pretensions are made that it is complete; but at the same time it gives a good idea of the names associated with the progress of documentary in this country and abroad. Where directors have also made story-films, these are not mentioned. Where no credit is given for the photography, it may be assumed that the director is responsible. Where no production company is named, it has either been unascertainable or the film was made independently. The sign ** denotes that the film has received a general booking in the cinemas of Britain; * denotes a private showing only; while s indicates that the film is made with sound.

ALEXANDRE, Robert

Un Monastère 1933*s

Production: Pathé-Nathan, Paris

Photography: Chadéfaux and Mésrobian

Sound: Remoué

A film record of life in the monastery community of La Trappe.

Ombres sur l'Europe 1934**s

Photography: René Brut and Louis Cottart

A political film dealing with the events which constitute the problem of the Polish Corridor.

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ANSTEY, Edgar

Uncharted Waters 1933

Production: E.M.B. with the Admiralty, London

Producer: John Grierson

A film of the initial stages of a survey of the Labrador Coast by the Admiralty survey ship *Challenger*.

Granton Trawler 1934**s

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: John Grierson

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

A film of drag-net fishing off the coast of Scotland.

AURENCHE, Jean

Pirates du Rhône 1933*s

Photography: Matras

A *reportage* dealing with the poachers and fish-dynamiters of the Rhône.

BASSE, Wilfried

Street Markets in Berlin 1929*

Blossom Time in Werder 1930*

Deutschland von Gestern und Heute 1934*s

Production: Basse Films and Kulturfilmbühne, Hanover

Music: Wolfgang Zeller

A cross-section of life in Germany to-day with reference to architectural and cultural traditions.

CAVALCANTI, Alberto

Rien que les heures 1926**

Photography: Jimmy Rogers

Design: M. Mirovitch

The passing of a day in Paris.

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CHENAL, Pierre

Paris-Cinema 1928

Production: Sofar, Paris

EISENSTEIN, Sergei

October 1927-28*

Production: Sovkino, Leningrad

Photography: Eduard Tissé

Assistant: G. Alexandrov

A document made for the tenth anniversary celebrations of the 1917 Revolution dealing with the events of the Workers' Revolution of that year.

ELTON, Arthur

The Shadow on the Mountain 1931**s

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: Jack Miller

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

Up-Stream 1931**s

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: Jack Miller

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of salmon spawning and fishing in Scotland.

The Voice of the World 1932**s

Production: New Era for the Gramophone Co., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: George Noble

The manufacture and social implications of radio-gramophones.

Aero-Engine 1933-34*

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

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Photography: George Noble

A film of the technical processes of the manufacture and testing of aeroplane engines with a final reel of their behaviour in the air.

Workers and Jobs 1935*s

Production: London Films for the Ministry of Labour

Photography: Oscar Borrodaile

The working of a typical Employment Exchange.

EPSTEIN, Jean

Finis Terrae 1928**

Production: Société Générale de Films, Paris

Photography: J. Barthe

A film of kelp harvesting on the island of Bannec off the Brittany Coast.

Mor-Vran (La Mer des Corbeaux) 1931**s

Production: Compagnie Universelle Cinématographique, Paris

Photography: Guichard, Brés, Rebière

Music: Alexis Archangelsky

A film of the fishing people on the islands of the Breton archipelago.

FLAHERTY, Robert

Nanook of the North 1920**

Production: For Reveillon Frères, New York

Distribution: Pathé

A film of Eskimo life around a trading post of the Reveillon Frères Fur Company in the Hudson Bay Territory.

Moana 1926**

Production: Famous-Players, Hollywood

Distribution: Paramount

A film of the South Sea islanders and their daily life.

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Tabu 1931**s

(With the late F. W. Murnau)

Distribution: Paramount

Music: Hugo Riesenfeld

A film of Samoan legend.

Industrial Britain 1933**s

(With John Grierson)

Production: E.M.B., London

Editing: Edgar Anstey

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of the craftsmanship of the industrial Midlands.

Man of Aran 1933-34**s

Production: Gaumont-British, London

Assistant: John Taylor

Editing: John Goldman

Music: John Greenwood

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of reconstructed life on one of the Aran islands.

GRIERSON, John

Drifters 1929**

Production: E.M.B., London

Photography: Basil Emmott

Distribution: New Era

A film of the North Sea herring fleet.

See also under:

Anstey, Elton, Flaherty, Grierson (Marion),
Legg, Spice, Taylor, Watt and Wright.

GRIERSON, Marion

So This Is London 1933-34**s

Production: E.M.B. for the Travel Association,
London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: George Noble

Distribution: Zenifilms

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For All Eternity 1934**s

Production: Strand Films for the Travel Association,
London

Distribution: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

A film of the cathedrals and religious ceremonies of
England.

The Key to Scotland 1935**s

Production: Strand Films for the Travel Association,
London

A *reportage* of the city, its people and industries, its
traditions and architectures.

HACKENSCHMIED, Alexander

Prague Castle 1932*s

A symphonic pattern of architecture synchronised
to music.

IVENS, Joris

The Bridge 1927*

Production: Capi, Holland

The opening and closing of a steel bridge.

Rain 1929*

(With Franken)

Music: Lou Lichtveld

The fall of a shower of rain.

We Are Building 1929

Production: Holland Trade Union of Building
Workers

Photography: Ivens, Hin, Fernhout and Kolthoff

Zuiderzee 1930*

Production: Capi, Holland

Assistant: Helene van Dongen

Photography: Ivens, Fernhout

The dredging and engineering activities connected
with the reclamation of land from the Zuiderzee.

AND THEIR PRINCIPAL FILMS

Philips-Radio 1931**s

Production: Philips-Radio Corporation, Holland

Photography: Fernhout, Kolthoff

Sound: Helene van Dongen

Music: Lou Lichtveld

A film of radio-valve manufacture and distribution.

Creosote 1931

Production: International League for Chemical
Wood Preparation, Holland

Photography: Fernhout and Dreville

Komsomol (Song of Heroes) 1932s

Production: Mejrabpom, Moscow

Scenario: Ivens and Skliut

Photography: Schelenkov

Music: Hans Eisler

A film of the Soviet League of Youth.

New Earth 1934s

Production: Capi, Holland

Photography: Fernout and Huisken

Music: Hans Eisler

A film of the final stage of the reclamation of the
Zuiderzee and the settlement of the peasants
thereon.

(See also under Storck.)

KAUFMAN, Mikhail

Moscow 1925

Production: Kultkino, Moscow

Spring 1929

Production: Vufku, Ukraine

The coming of Spring to the Ukraine.

Without Parallel 1930

Production: Vufku, Ukraine

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Avio-March 1934

Production: Soyuzkino-Chronika, Leningrad
A film of Soviet aviation progress.

KORDA, Alexander

Conquest of the Air 1935s

Production: London Films

Scenario: John Monk Saunders and Hugh Gray

Photography: Hans Schneeberger

Editing: William Hornbeck

A documentary in the theatrical style of the history of aviation.

LACOMBE, Georges

La Zone 1927**

A reportage on a particular district of Paris.

LEGG, Stuart

The New Generation 1932**

Production: New Era for Chesterfield Educational Authorities

Photography: G. E. Gibbs

A localised survey of child education with special reference to the needs made upon education of the child after leaving school.

The New Operator 1932s

Production: G.P.O., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: G. E. Gibbs

The training of a girl telephonist.

Telephone Workers 1932-33s

Production: G.P.O., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: G. E. Gibbs

The extension of the telephone system to a new suburb.

AND THEIR PRINCIPAL FILMS

Cable Ship 1933**s

(With G. A. Shaw)

Production: G.P.O., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: John Taylor and A. E. Jeakins

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

The work of the Post Office cable ships in repairing submarine telephone cables.

The Coming of the Dial 1933s

Production: G.P.O., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: G. E. Gibbs

The automatic telephone service and the research behind it.

B.B.C.: The Voice of Britain 1934-35**s

Production: G.P.O., London, with the British Broadcasting Corporation

Producers: John Grierson and Alberto Cavalcanti

Photography: George Noble, J. D. Davidson, W. Shenton

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

The organisation and social implications underlying national radio in Britain.

LODS, Jean

La Vie d'un Fleuve (La Seine) 1933**s

Production: Filmtac, Paris

Photography: Boris Kauffmann

Music: Maurice Jaubert

Distribution: Zenifilms

A description of the Seine from source to mouth in relation to the agricultural and industrial life on its banks.

Le Mil 1934s

Production: Filmtac, Paris

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Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of the new dock extensions at Southampton and the interdependence of Empire Trade.

*Shipyard 1934-35**s*

Production: G.B. Instructional for Orient Shipping Line

Photography: George Pocknall, Frank Bundy, Frank Goodliffe, Harry Rignold

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of the building of the S.S. *Orion* and the sociological and economic effects on the life of the town.

*The Face of Britain 1934-35**s*

Production: G.B. Instructional, London

Photography: George Pocknall, Frank Bundy

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of the natural and scientific planning of Britain with reference to the respective power of coal and electricity.

RUTTMANN, Walther

*Berlin (Symphony of a City) 1927***

Production: Fox-Europa, Berlin

Scenario: Karl Mayer and Ruttman

Photography: Karl Freund, Kuntze, Baberski, Schaffer

Music: Edmund Meisel

Distribution: Wardour Films

A day in the life of Berlin from dawn till nightfall.

*World Melody 1928**s*

Production: Hamburg-Amerika Line, Germany

Music: Wolfgang Zeller

Sound: Guido Bagier

A cross-section of peoples and places served by the Hamburg-Amerika liners.

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Acciaio (Steel) 1933*^s

Production: Cines, Rome

Photography: Massimo Terzano and Domenico Scala

Music: G. F. Malipiero

SCHNEIDEROV, Vladimir

El-Yemen 1929

Production: Mejrabpomfilm, Moscow

Photography: Ilya Tolchan

A film of southern Arabia.

At an Altitude of 4500 Metres (Tian-Shan) 1931^s

Production: Mejrabpom, Moscow

Photography: Mstislav Kotelnikov

Music: Zatayevich

Great Tokio 1932^s

Production: Mejrabpom, Moscow

Photography: Mark Troyanovski

Music: Kosai Yamada

Two Oceans (The Cruise of the 'Sibiryakov') 1932^s

Production: Mejrabpom, Moscow

Photography: Mark Troyanovski

Music: Bugoslavski

The Golden Lake 1935^s

Production: Mejrabpom, Moscow

Photography: Shelenkov

Music: Vassilenko

SCHUB, Esther

The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty 1927

Production: Sovkino, Leningrad

A news-reel compilation.

Cannons or Tractors 1930

Production: Sovkino, Leningrad

Photography: Stepanov

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SPICE, Evelyn

Weather Forecast 1934**s

Production: G.P.O., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: George Noble

Sound: Cavalcanti

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

A film of the collecting and dissemination of news relating to weather conditions.

STORCK, Henri

Images d'Ostende 1928*

Idylle à la Plage 1930*

(With Joris Ivens)

Borinage 1933s

Production: E.P.I., Brussels

Scenario: Storck and Ivens

Photography: Storck and Ivens

Music: Hans Hauska

Sound: Helene van Dongen

A *reportage* among the mining areas of north Belgium.

STRAND, Paul

Pescados 1934-35s

Production: Department of Fine Arts, Mexican Government

General Supervision and Photography: Paul Strand

Scenario: Carlos Chavez, Velazquez Chavez and Heinwar Roadakiewicz

Music: Sylvestre Revueltas

A film of the exploitation by vested interests of the fishermen along the Gulf of Vera Cruz.

TAYLOR, Donald

Lancashire at Work and Play 1933-34**s

Production: E.M.B. for the Lancashire Industrial Development Association

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Producer: John Grierson

Photography: George Noble

Distribution: Zenifilms

A survey of Lancashire's industrial development over the last hundred years due to the power of steam, coal and electricity.

Spring Comes to England 1934**s

Production: E.M.B. for the Ministry of Agriculture, London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: Jimmy Rogers and F. Jones

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

A film of gathering and marketing methods of Spring crops.

Citizens of the Future 1935**s

Production: Strand Films and G.B. Instructional, London, for the National Union of Teachers

Photography: George Noble

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of vocational training for children of all ages.

TURIN, Victor

Turksib 1928**

Production: Vostokfilm, U.S.S.R.

Photography: E. Slavinski and B. Srancisson

A film of the building of the Turkestan-Siberian railway.

VERTOV, Dziga

News-Reel Compilations 1920-27

Kino-Calendar, History of the Civil War, Kino-Eye, Kino-Truth, Stride Soviet, A Sixth Part of the World, etc.

The Eleventh Year 1927

Production: Vufku, Ukraine

Photography: Mikhail Kaufman

AND THEIR PRINCIPAL FILMS

A record of industrial and economic construction in the Ukraine during ten years of Soviet regime.

Man with the Movie-Camera 1928-29*

Production: Vufku, Ukraine

Photography: Mikhail Kaufman

An exposition of the principles of the Kino-Eye.

Enthusiasm (Symphony of the Don Basin) 1931**s

Production: Vufku, Ukraine

Photography: Zeitlen

A sound film composed to stimulate production in the Don industrial area.

Three Songs of Lenin 1934s*

Production: Mejrabpomfilm, Moscow

Photography: Surensky, Magidson, Monastirsky

Music: Shaporin

VIGO, Jean

Apropos de Nice 1930

Taris—Champion Swimmer 1931

WATT, R. H.

Six-Thirty Collection 1934**s

Production: G.P.O., London

Producer: John Grierson

Photography: J. D. Davidson

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

A film of the collection, sorting and despatch of a typical evening's mail at a big London Post Office.

WRIGHT, Basil

O'er Hill and Dale 1931-32**s

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A Scots shepherd's life in lambing season.

APPENDIX OF DOCUMENTARY DIRECTORS

The Country Comes to Town 1931-32**s

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

Distribution: G.B. Distributors

A film of the bringing of London's food and milk supplies from country to city overnight.

Windmill in Barbados 1933**s

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

Sound: Cavalcanti

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

A film of sugar-cane plantations in the West Indies and the contrast of old and new conditions of labour.

Cargo from Jamaica 1933**s

Production: E.M.B., London

Producer: John Grierson

A film of the plantations and loading of bananas.

The Song of Ceylon 1934-35**s

Production: John Grierson with the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board

Assistant: John Taylor

Music: Walter Leigh

Distribution: A.B.F.D.

A dialectic film of old and new Ceylon showing the influence of Western civilisation on native life.

The following story, travel, scientific and lecture films might also be studied in relation to the documentary method:

Chang, Rango and Grass (Schoedsack and Cooper)

Voyage au Congo (Gide and Allegret)

Pamyr, Roof of the World (Yerofeyev)

A Shanghai Document (Blioch)

Salt of Svanetia (Kolotozov)

AND THEIR PRINCIPAL FILMS

The Covered Wagon (Cruze)
The Iron Horse (Ford)
Kameradschaft (Pabst)
Ekstase (Machaty)
Arsenal, Ivan and *Air-City* (Dovjenko)
Counterplan (Ermler and Yukevitch)
Men and Jobs (Macharet)
Wings over Everest (Barkas and Montagu)
Deserter and *Mechanism of the Brain* (Pudovkin)
The Fox Magic Carpet Series (Herbert)
The *Cinemagazine* Series by Andrew Buchanan
The FitzPatrick Traveltalks
The scientific and agricultural films of Benoit-Levy and Jean Painlévé, Paris, and the *Secrets of Nature* and *Secrets of Life* series of Percy Smith, Oliver Pike, Charles Head, Mary Field, etc.

The following British documentaries are now in production:

G.P.O. Film Unit:

Night Mail (Watt)
S.O.S. (Radio Service) (Cavalcanti)
The English Year (Spice)

G.B. Instructional:

The Mine (Holmes)
A film on *Road Safety* (Rotha)

London Films:

Elephant Boy (Flaherty)
Conquest of the Air (Korda)

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